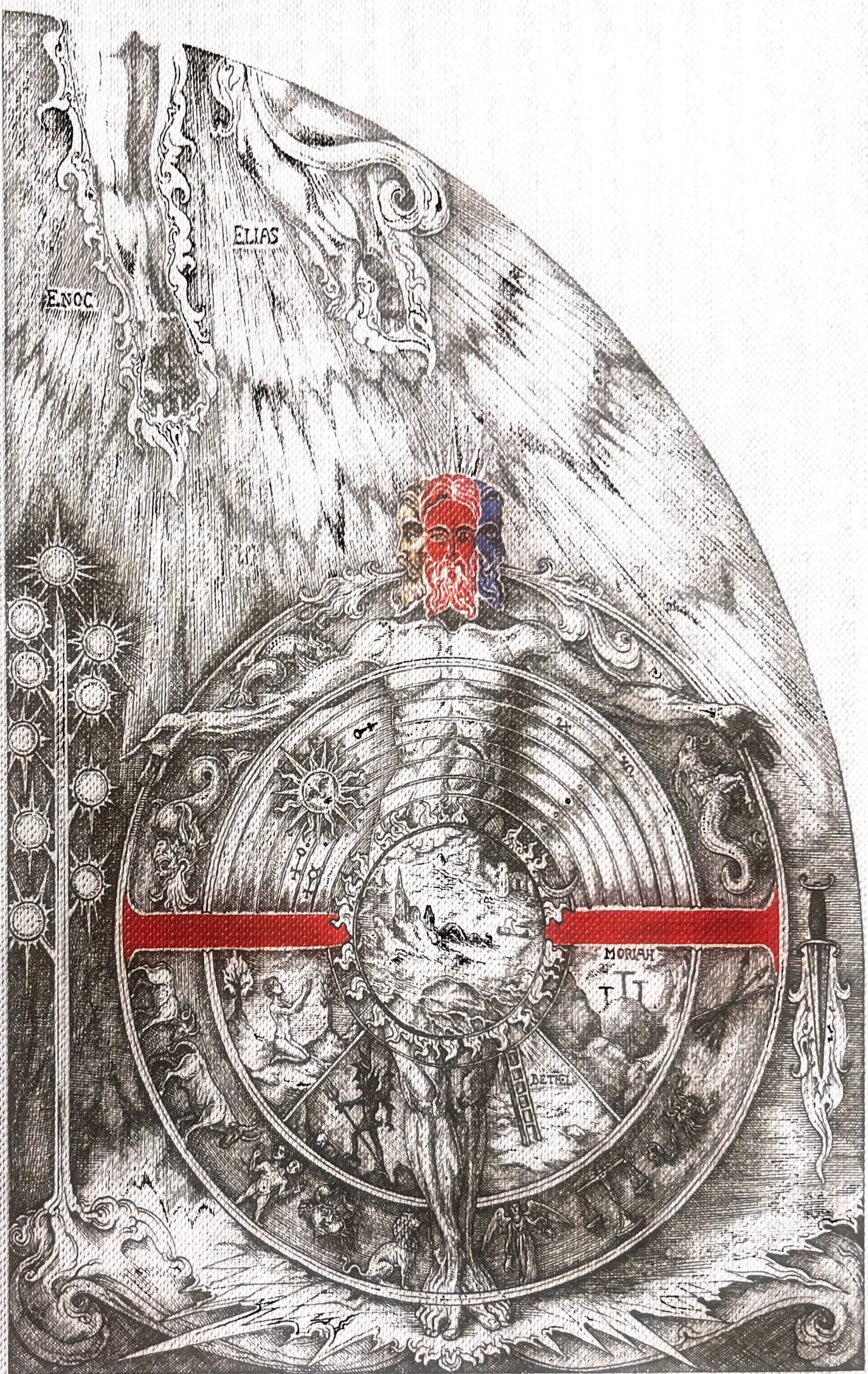
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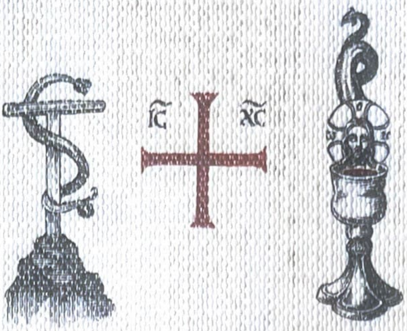
IAO

OPHITE ICONOGRAPHY

JOSÉ GABRIEL ALEGRÍA SABOGAL



IAO is an iconographic proposal, an attempt to illustrate the Gnostic worldview and its myths as understood by the Ophites, a sect of which little is known. It is, perhaps, an exercise of imagination, of what Christian iconography could have resembled if the Ophites had survived. Visually, it follows the sequences of the *Speculum Humanae Salvationis* and the *Biblia Pauperum*, reordering their contents according to this heterodox initiative.

Central to this initiative is the reconstruction of the Ophite diagram described by Origen of Alexandria in *Contra Celsum* - a complex system in which their whole cosmic vision was integrated.

IAO rejects the commonly held notion of Gnosticism as a mere form of dualism within Christianity, and explores its relationship with other religions - if only by conceptual coincidence, following Edward Conze's comparison between Buddhism and Gnosis.

Moreover, the Ophites, by declaring Christ to be an incarnation of the Serpent of Genesis, stood outside the moral spectrum of what is now understood as Christianity. Instead, notions of non-duality can be found in the doctrines of Basilides and the idea of the Pleroma, which are explored within, both conceptually and visually.

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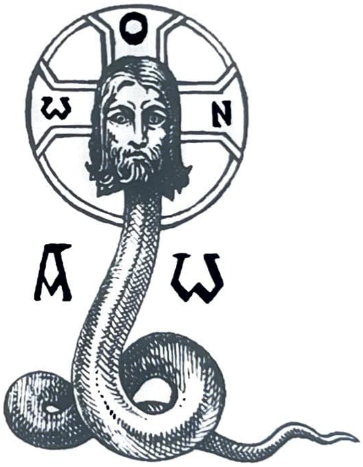
IAO

Ophite Iconography

JOSÉ GABRIEL ALEGRÍA SABOGAL



MMXXVI

*To the memory of my father, who always
despised my mystical ramblings.*

Here they are.

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INTRODUCTION

SINCE the Nag Hammadi library was discovered in 1945, this treasure of the light has attracted the attention of scholars and curious minds. Yet its impact on culture - especially in art - has been minimal, considering its relevance as a document for human knowledge in the broader sense.

This is a curious paradox, since the discovery of such texts looks like the omen of an auspicious age, just as when treasures (*Terma*) were discovered by Tibetan masters, as parts of a progressive revelation. *Aperietur in tempore*, "to be opened in time" said the book held by Amadeus of Portugal,[1] referring to his angelic prophecies. This follows the same idea as the *Terma*, namely, that some texts are to be discovered in their proper time, so that the mind - both individual and collective - might be mature enough to understand their contents. Yet, on the contrary, at the time of their discovery, mankind had been passing through one of its darkest moments.

Gnosticism lacks images in a remarkable way; the abstraction of its texts is only equated by the visual silence of its few and discrete remains. And yet the texts are filled with images!

These images are, in fact, visions, allegories, and myths of a yet unexplored richness. The ambitious proposal here is to consolidate an iconographic programme, such as those which consistently illuminated the frontispieces of old cathedrals. For this, we will not attempt to keep any sort of puritanism, for the original images, if they ever existed, are completely unknown or deeply syncretistic. On the contrary, we might take all useful elements from the tradition of

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[1] Mujica, Ramón *Ángeles Apócrifos en América Virreinal* (México D.F.: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1992), p. 54.

Christian iconography and its long and convoluted development, and carefully twist them to fit the gnostic interpretation of transcendent reality crystallized in their visions.

The most relevant visual remains of the Gnostics are the gemstones commonly referred to (yet mistakenly so) as *Abraxas* gems. We shall include recreations of them and new formulations, but our iconographic proposal will not be restricted to what little they offered.

In the present work, images will not be the servants of the texts. But the other way around: the texts will largely describe the images and be developed around them, for we aim to emphasize the relevance of such visions, as related to direct experience, contrary to the methodology that has ruled the Christian West so far, where all visual experience is secondary regarding a sacred text. The paradigm of the text is still patent in every modern thought, avoiding the fact that it is a clear inheritance of biblical religiosity. In ancient India, the hierarchy was inverse; the primary experience can be said to be visual, that of the *Rishis* as "seers," and the essential tradition is that of oral transmission. The text and the book, therefore, never received the attention that they did in the West. This attention, we believe, is inevitably linked to a secondary, reflexive experience - more so to interpretation than to mystical union.

The element that might redeem this hermeneutical problem is the "book of visions," one that is both text and experience in an indivisible way. Only this might convey the multi-sensorial experience of revelation. Therefore alchemy, related more directly to such a process than the carcass of mainstream religion, felt the urge to use images and even to create silent books. Our attempt, more than once, has been to create a book of visions. The current work is yet another output in the same endless task.

Although we speak of images as visions, we should not forget that icons had their own history and controversies within Christianity. This was particularly true in the East; holy icons were identified as a tenet of the Orthodox faith, so much so that the triumph over iconoclasm is identified with the Sunday of Orthodoxy - as a triumph over heresy as a whole. John of Damascus identified holy images with the very incarnation of the Christ as a visible man. Since several gnostic branches tended to deny the incarnation of Christ in the flesh, it is interesting to consider whether they would have been iconoclasts in practice. However, as aforementioned, this book will make use of all the iconographic variations that happened within the dominant churches, both Catholic and Orthodox, and unapologetically twist them to fit the Gnostic narrative.

The three axis which the images will revolve around are three distinctive topics of the gnostic world view: The demiurge (and his relation to the manifested world), the myth of Sophia (and the female aspects of the divine), and the ophite Christology, or the saviour as a serpent.

Demiurge, Sophia, and the serpent saviour are certainly the topics that are also most alien to Christianity as it has come down to us, and therefore lack proper representations. They are also alien to most later heresies or deviations of Christian doctrine, which, instead of becoming creative and visionary, became increasingly puritanical and narrow-minded. All heresies are not the same, yet they have been thrown into the same bag by the dominant voice of the Church. This does not, however, make them equal.

We will, to the best of our knowledge, try to discern the many different tenets that are identified as "Gnostic" but are, in fact, incompatible with each other. Gnosticism was not a consistent doctrine, and no man can fully define it; it is a collection of loose patterns that were common to a group of sects, and even then, such sects showed enormous differences between each other. The stance of this book will be centred around the scarce descriptions offered by Hippolytus of the doctrine of the *Naassenes*, also called the Ophites, and will take a non-dualistic approach. This last point will be linked as well to those described as "libertine Gnostics."

We would like to distance ourselves as much as possible from what we consider two fundamental misinterpretations. The first and most well-known is the misrepresentation of Gnosticism as a dualistic extremism within Christianity. There are plenty of reasons to believe that Gnosticism is not a phenomenon exclusive to Christianity; it is not a product of it and could very well be older. Gnostic texts go way beyond the dualistic cosmogony that is usually associated to them, and many gnostic ideas abandon the fears and restrictions that correspond to a dualistic worldview. It is, simply put, not the same as Manichaeism. We hope that this will be convincingly dealt with. This disease has many branches, but perhaps the most recent might be the widely spread ideas of Samael Aun Weor. The other misinterpretation and problem comes from the Gnostic rejection of the Jewish God as a demiurge, which can lead to strong antisemitic tendencies. Such is the case of the fringe, yet truly harmful use of gnosis made by Miguel Serrano, who weaponized the Marcionite dissociation of the New and Old Testaments, as an excuse for mystifying antisemitism.

There was an important stream of Judaic Gnosis, and the exegesis of several early Gnostic sects cannot be reduced to a complete rejection of the Torah; it is simply not the case. It should be enough to mention characters such as Philo Judaeus or Simon Magus. The gnostic characteristics of their thinking cannot be said to rely simply on the rejection of their own god, but on developing a many-faced, multi-layered conception of the deity. Female and hermaphrodite conceptions of the godhead, as Simon's *Ennoia*, would also find interesting echoes in the Zohar.

But we believe that Gnosticism is not and was not a religion nor a sect; it is the individual's experience of radical knowledge, and no one can call himself gnostic. Certainly, he who does, is not. For this concerns only to the knowledge of the heart, and the heart alone. Any attempt to turn this into a doctrine of any kind is futile, and absurd since its very beginning.

In Defence of Heresy

HERESY is at best a controversial term; using it implies taking a stance in a religious debate. Strictly speaking, it has been mostly used in history to define all that falls outside the scope of the orthodox and Catholic doctrine, and the many heresies are therefore as variate and colourful as human thought.

Jung considers, regarding the Trinity, that heresies are attempts to rationalize that which should be kept as a mystery.[2] Yet this obviates the whole complex development of dogmatic theology, in which great pains were taken to make a marriage of faith and philosophy. On the other hand, heresies can also make extensive use of even more mysterious and irrational elements than the orthodox ritual.

Our approach is undoubtedly influenced by perennialism, and its understanding of metaphysics, which is unique within modern thought. But perennialism led to traditionalism, and traditionalism concluded that perennial truths have been preserved within the "orthodox" religious systems that have survived. This is from where our fundamental disagreement comes. Religions are, at their core, ways for achieving, managing, and interpreting the union with the divine. But they can very well lose this experiential element and become nothing but empty social systems where tradition is equated with passivity and conformity. Christianity, since the coming of Luther, was certainly doomed to decay and failure; for it lost its darker mysteries and was forced to justify itself in logical terms, becoming nothing but a way of life. But earlier on we see the heresiologists strongly concerned mostly with keeping social cohesion, of the Church as a community first, and not the means for spiritual realization.

---

[2] "The sequence of the creeds illustrates the evolution of the Trinity idea through the centuries. In the course of its development it either consistently avoided, or successfully combated, all rationalistic deviations, such as, for instance, the so-plausible-looking Arian heresy." Jung, Carl Gustav, "A Psychological Approach to the Dogma of the Trinity" in Jung, Carl Gustav *Psychology and Religion: West and East* (New York: Bollingen Foundation, 1958), p. 148.

Mysticism, on the contrary, is much concerned with the experience of death.

Most of the time, it even subverts and breaks social rules to achieve direct experience. This is where our defence of heresy comes from, as an anachronistic response to Irenaeus's *Adversus Haereses*. Gnostic heresies preserve what religion has lost, and even what it was never capable of achieving. In fact, we believe that the practices that lead to direct experience can never be fully systematized, never fully absorbed into a functional social system, for the divine is always terrible. Society, although traditionally based in revelations as its foundation, is but a steppingstone and ultimately will always reveal itself as just another dim layer in the veil.

Different religions have created complex structures and hierarchies to grant such experiences and initiations to selected individuals. The fear and hatred towards early Gnosticism stemmed from the belief that such practices had been hijacked, or even mastered and distilled to a purer form, by individuals who were outsiders to the Church, or broke its hierarchical order. A church that could only preach fear and obedience to most of its followers.

Eastern & Western Gnosticism

A Bridge

STRONGER examples of gnosis can be certainly found within Hinduism and Buddhism than those which remain in Christianity today. This is perhaps why Eliade has used the term "gnosis" to analyse Indian religion since an early stage.[3]

---

[3] But regarding a stage in the Upanishads, where esoteric knowledge is no longer linked to a specific ritual or theological context, in contrast with the previous Vedic stage in which the Yajna played the central role. See: Eliade, Mircea *Historia de las creencias y de las ideas religiosas*, Capítulo IX: "La india antes de Gautama Buda"

The images in this book, on the contrary, will reveal a fundamental clinging to Western imagery, as if the Middle Ages, Hermeticism, alchemy, and the Renaissance had merged into one obscure attic of late Christian imagination. And this is where we might take a Jungian approach:[4] images, symbols, and cultural objects do create an unconscious world – the one in which religions develop. This, we believe, cannot be chosen by an individual; the individual is born within a system and the effort to relate and understand eternal symbols should be the effort of a lifetime, and starts way before one has the maturity needed to choose a religion. This does not imply that conversion is impossible, but it simply is not an option for the author, for the relationship is an emotional one. And the visions and symbols that belong to another historical and spiritual process – a much older one to be frank – will never fully appeal to the sensibility of one born in a world essentially defined by the fall of Christianity.

When modern Western man hears the word religion, he immediately thinks of God, a male creator God. Even the fact that those who do not practice religion in the modern world need to call themselves atheists denounces this ridiculous simplification. Vishnu does not directly create. The Rigveda does not start with a cosmogony, but has several, and none of them is literal. Brahma is not worshiped despite being the creator, and Buddhism puts no emphasis in the existence or absence of deities.

The word "religion" falls short if we simply consider these basic differences. Only Gnosticism takes the terms and concepts which are deeply engrained into the architecture of Christianity and reorders them into a completely different building. This is what we aim to do visually as well. It approaches, considerably, concepts present in Eastern religions, but in its own code. This is a precious opportunity to breach through the barrier of language, both spoken and symbolic. The inner emptiness, ineffable qualities attributed to the ultimate figure of the godhead, the creation of this world by a lower god, the female personifications of divine knowledge, the sacred sexuality, even the worship of the serpent, and most importantly, non-duality – the Pleroma. These are all themes that have strong parallels in the East, and no precedent in biblical concepts or myths. But there is no bridge, no way to grasp such ideas, if it were only for the exegesis of the Church Fathers.

(Madrid: Cristiandad, 1974), p. 255.

[4] For a better explanation of this stance, see: Jung, Carl Gustav, *Aion: Contribución a los simbolismos del sí-mismo* (Buenos Aires: Paidós, 2008), p. 186.

However, they too became infected with such wonderful ideas at an early stage. Our aim will be not to attack nor denounce, but to celebrate these glimpses of mysterious light.

The similarities between Gnosticism and Buddhism, specifically with the *prajnaparamita* literature, were identified by Edward Conze[5] and Givanni Verdardi.[6] But earlier, C. W. King had already daringly stated "that the whole Gnostic system is derived, not from the Kabbala, nor from the Greek philosophy, but from the theosophy of the Brahmins."[7] Some consider this to be the case with the Gnosticism of Carpocrates, as it shows strong tenets of transmigration, and it is even hinted that Bardaisan of Edessa might have travelled to India.[8]

But such a fascinating relationship is only conceptual, and no
lineage can be established between the two doctrines.
It is but a possibility, one that we will try
to entertain and develop, with an
admixture of suspicion
and hope.

* * *

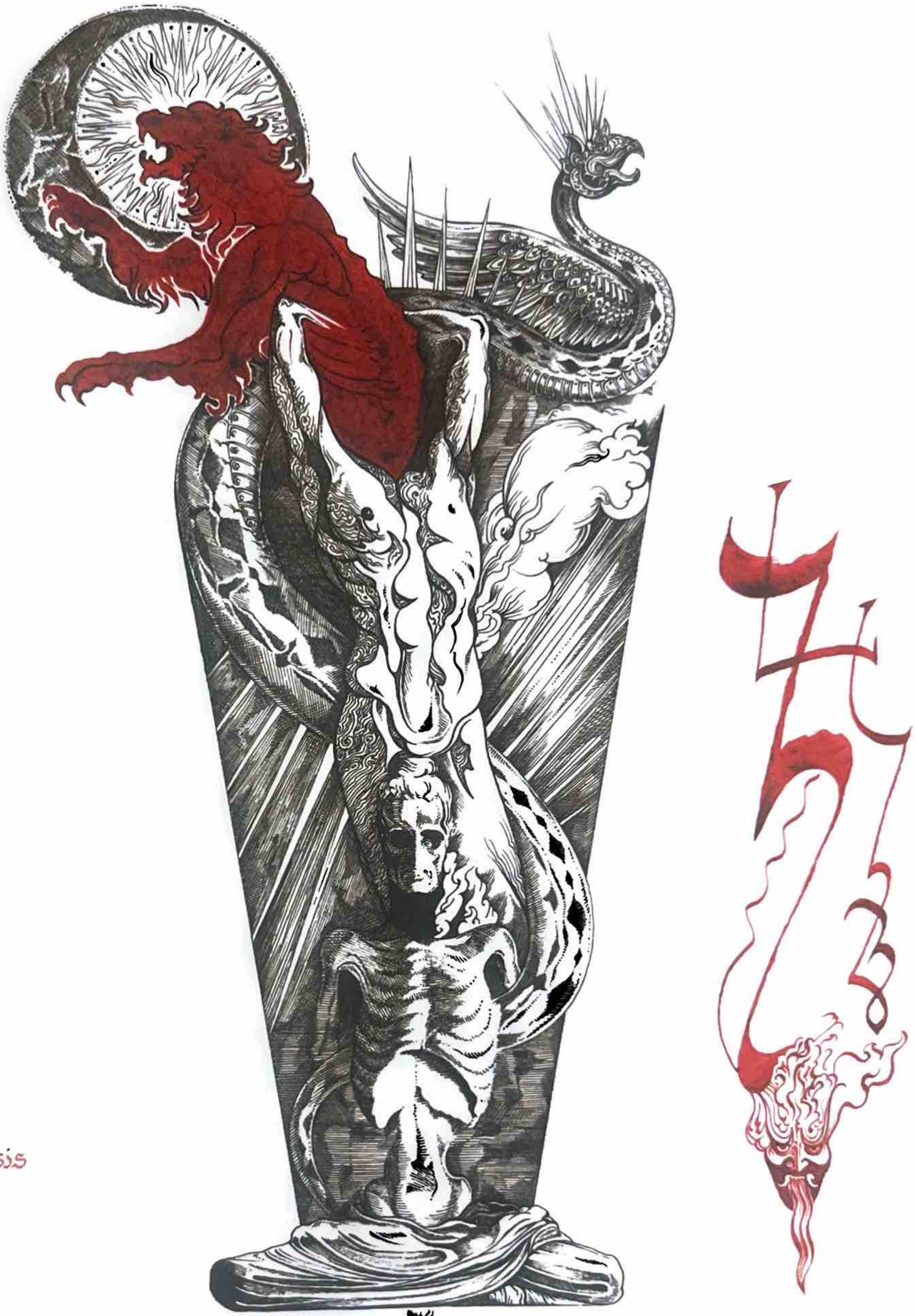
---

[5] Conze, Edward (1967), "Buddhism and Gnosis," in Bianchi, U. (ed.), *Origins of Gnosticism: Colloquium of Messina*, 13–18 April 1966.

[6] Verardi, Givanni (1997), "The Buddhists, the Gnostics and the Antinomistic Society, or the Arabian Sea in the First Century AD" in *AION*, 57 (3/4), pp. 324–346.

[7] King, C. W. *The Gnostics and their Remains: Ancient and Mediaeval* (London: David Nutt, 1887), p. 262.

[8] Halbfass, Wilhelm, *India y Europa: Ejercicio de entendimiento filosófico* (México D.F.: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2013), pp. 53–54.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I

THE WORLD AS REFLECTION

OF THE DEFORMING MIRROR AND THE THEOPHANIES OF THE PAST & THE FUTURE, WHICH ARE ALL EMBLEMS OF HUMAN IGNORANCE.

ΠΙϹΤΙϹ
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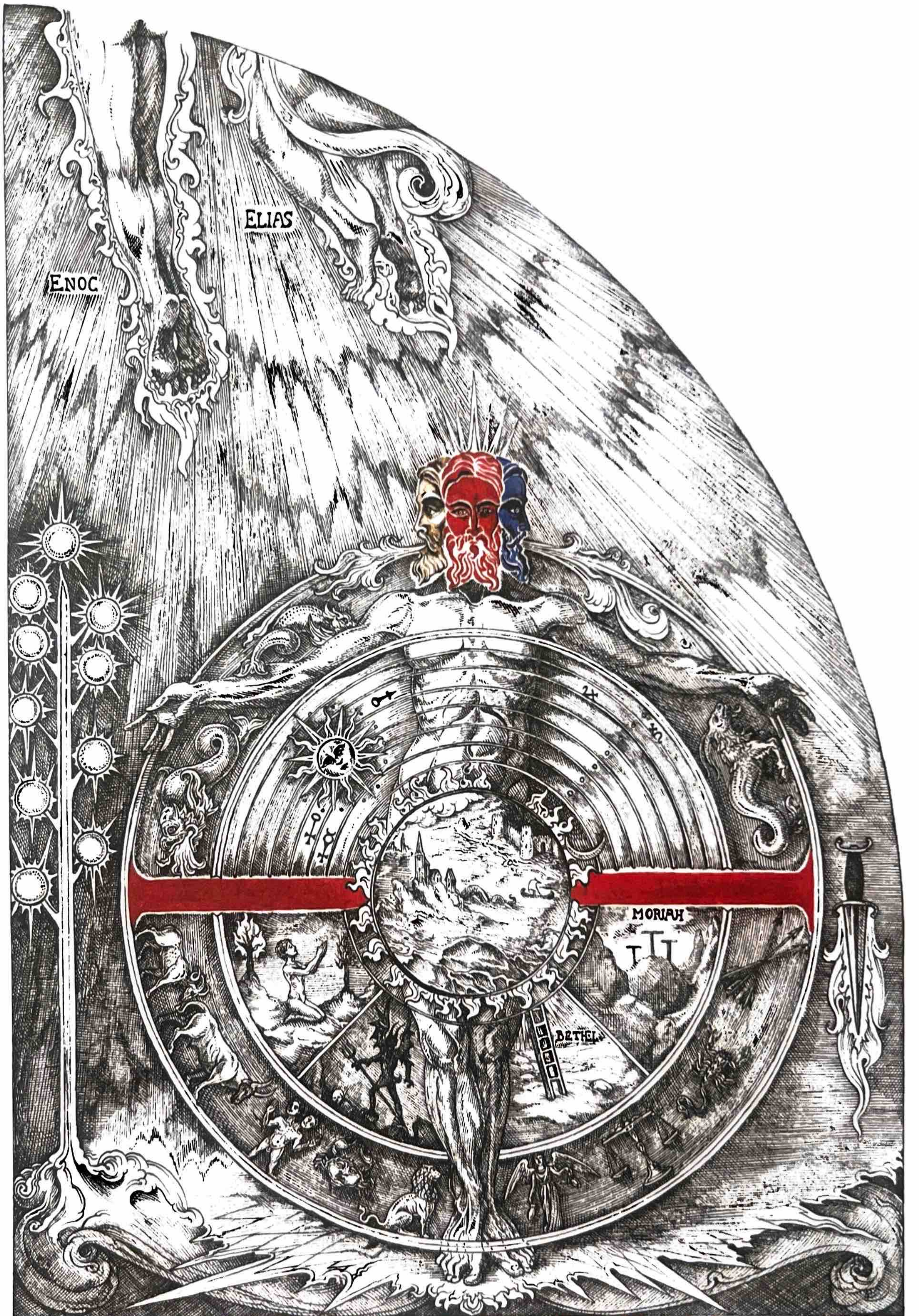


Caín es aquel cuya ofrenda no fue aceptada por el Dios de este mundo, quien en cambio, recibió el sangriento sacrificio de Abel; pues el dueño de este mundo se deleita en la sangre.
Hipolito, Refutatio V 16:9 Genes. 2,10-14; 4,15 a 25

Todos los profetas y la ley, necios e ignorantes de todo, hablaron del Demiurgo como de un dios. Hipolito, Refutatio VI 35:1
Rey solitario, venda de ceguera, olvido inconsciente. Origenes, Contra Celsum VI:31

HERE IT IS attempted to consolidate a worldview in an image. That this vision might serve as a map, an allegorical guide on the journey of the soul.

The image will be described from right to left, starting from the bottom. This follows a pattern of ascension, from the lowest state of materialism and ignorance towards the vision of Sophia. This will not include the higher realms of the Aeons.

The quotes in red read the following:

> *Chaim is him whose offering was not accepted by the God of this world, who instead, received the bloody sacrifice of Abel, for the owner of this world delights in blood.*
>
> (Hippolytus, *Refutatio* V 16:9 Genes. 2, 10–14; 4,15 et 25)

> *All the prophets and the Law, stubborn and ignorant of everything, spoke about the demiurge as a god.*
>
> (Hippolytus, *Refutatio* VI 35:1)

> *Solitary king, blindfold, unconscious oblivion.*
>
> (Origen, *Contra Celsum* VI:31)

The man holding the world is the cursed god,[1] the demiurge. He is akin to man and so is the structure of the universe, which all mystics have assured, time and again, has the form of a man. It should be enough to remind us about the tradition of the man as a Microcosm or the myth of Purusha. It is said that this god made man in his own image and likeness. But both mortal man and this god are made in the image of the higher *Anthropos*, the eternal and primordial image of man, which is not depicted in this composition. Both are reflections then, distorted in different degrees. However, the fact that they are both created after a common model is what prevents us from engaging in the rejection of the world that is so commonly, yet mistakenly, attributed to all gnostic thought. The demiurge thinks of himself as the author of the material world, but he is mistaken, and he wants to be worshiped as such. At the same time, he encourages the rejection of the flesh as a condition of his devotion. But, if the world is holy, the work of a holy god, should not the flesh created in his likeness be holy? He is therefore not a wicked creator, only a deceiver.

---

[1] It is only referred to as *cursed God* in Origen of Alexandria, *Contra Celsum*, VI 27.

The world is surrounded by a layer of fire, as the ancients believed, and the stages that in the *Bhavachakra* would be occupied by the realms of animals, hell, and hungry spirits, are here replaced with four cardinal places where this god manifested himself in wrathful forms: The garden of Eden, where Adam, among the trees of life and death, prays towards the godhead. Gehenna, Hell, Tartarus or simply the abyss, inhabited by the contradictory figure of the devil, as an irreducible expression of this god's negativity and his role as a punisher. Bethel, where he manifested to Jacob in a dream, opening the gates of heaven and showing him the ladder towards it, and the rock on which Jacob rested his head (it is important to remember that Jacob's experience was one of terror and awe, wrestling with god). Lastly, Mount Moriah, where Abraham was sent to sacrifice his son, and where Christian tradition holds was the place of Golgotha, the grave of Adam, and the place where Armageddon will begin.

Thus concluding, in a nutshell, the notion of history as the unfolding of a theophany.

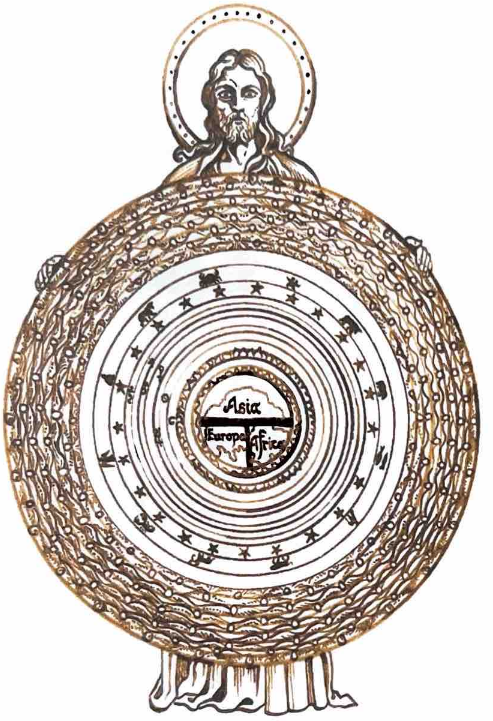
The upper half and outer ring of the wheel follows the Ptolemaic system with seven planets and twelve zodiac signs. Astrology was most likely not seen in a positive light by the Gnostics. The Archons would be identified with the seven planets and the combination of zodiac signs and elements conditioning birth – something that the individual should escape from, not celebrate.[2] In Hermeticism, we find this astrological doctrine combined with the belief in reincarnation,[3] which leads us to our next clarification.

---

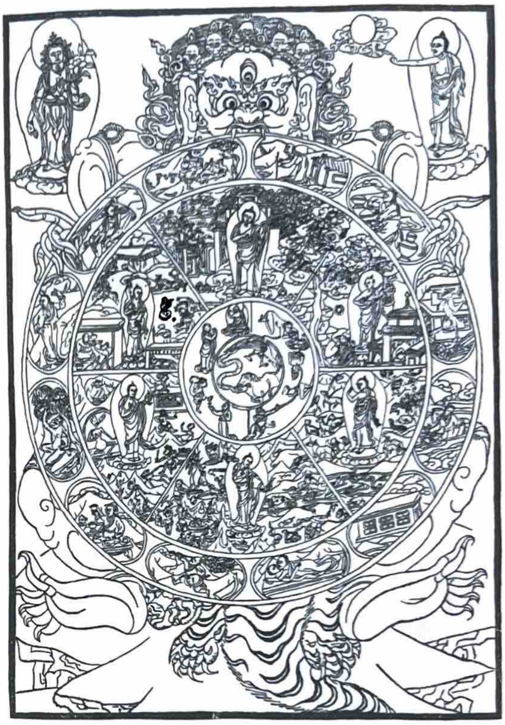
[2] Such an attitude can be found in the *Peratae*, who placed a great emphasis on astrology but claimed to be the only ones capable of escaping its "corruption." See: Hyppolitus, *Refutatio* V 16: 1.

[3] The transmigration was conditioned by the signs of the zodiac and the four elements, reincarnating in animals considered in accordance with these. This cycle of reincarnation also included, like in Buddhism, the possibility of the human soul for reincarnating in gods and demons. See: *Corpus Hermeticum* X 7.

The image thus combines both the macrocosmic man from the Middle Ages, closely related to the Ptolemaic system, with the Bhavachakra, where all the world is trapped within the clutches of Yama, the god of death. This combined world view is attempted, for it seems to be the case that some Gnostics believed in the transmigration of souls as well.[4]



Cosmografia teologica, After the mural by Piero di Puccio in the *Camposanto* of Siena, 1389–1391.



Bhavachakra, Wheel of reincarnation and becoming, reproduced in *Der Weise und der Tor: Buddhistische Legenden aus Tibet,* Gustav Kiepenheuer Verlag, Leipzig, 1978. p. 239.

This was by no means exclusive to Gnosticism nor Hermeticism; there are plenty hints of such beliefs in the classical world. It was mostly spread by some notions attributed to Pythagorean and orphic cults,[5] but the very notion of *Anamnesis* in Plato seems to imply such transmigration in some way or another.

Reincarnation then, should not be perceived as an exclusively Eastern doctrine, where it was fully developed in detail at a rather late stage in works as the *Bardo Thodol*, a doctrine that was not fully explicit in Vedic times.

---

[4] Hints of this can be found in the Apocryphon known as the *Secret Book of John,* BNH I, 255, 26, 23.27, 10.

[5] For a larger development of this topic see: Bernabé, Alberto, *Reencarnación. La transmigración de las almas entre Oriente y Occidente* (Madrid: Abada, 2011).

Transmigration is, of course, incompatible with the notion of a "final judgement" or the resurrection of an individual's flesh as something desirable; the main contradiction which we'd like to emphasize in this chapter is between linear and circular time, and how Gnosticism opens gates from one to the other.

Moving forward with the description of the image, the circle is interrupted by the cross, which is expressed as the limit between this world and the other, a metaphysical intersection rather than a physical or anecdotal object.[6] It constitutes the boundary and the place where the soul might escape this scheme and be reintegrated into the Pleroma. The godhead has three faces with three distinct colours: yellow/white, red, and blue or black. This is, of course, a hint at Dante's description of Lucifer (*Inferno*, Canto XXXIV) which would be interpreted by some as allegorical of the continents and races of the world. But we lean towards applying here Baltrusaitis'[7] daring hypothesis, namely that the Western figures and imagination for the daemonic were fuelled by Eastern imagery that travelled through the Silk Road. And so, Dante's vision, which according to some had Islamic influx,[8] could also have been inspired by some of the many Vajrayana Bodhisattvas that display three faces with the very same colours. Such ferocious deities could easily have been interpreted as images of the devil by Christian eyes, and they still are. This is by no means something that can be proved; it is only an imaginative hope.

It is the *spiritus*, breath, *pneuma*, and *atman* of this deity which aims to give life to this world but does, in fact, the opposite. Outside the scope of the visible stand the flaming sword and the tree of life, both mentioned in the ophite diagram as the liminal signs for illumination.

Enoch and Elijah are the ones fully liberated from this schema, depicted as they ascend, for they both left the world in flesh and soul. They are mentioned in Psellos' commentary to the Chaldean Oracles,[9] as they fulfil the doctrine of fire and ascension thereby implied. But Psello comes to an interesting problem: how could he as a Christian reconcile this fiery notion, which naturally leads to cremation, with Christian burial practices? And his response is that this fiery consumption of the body depends only on divine grace and it is most likely about a mystical fiery body, not the actual human flesh. A somewhat similar problem with a different solution is what led ancient Zoroastrians to the practice of sky burial on the towers of silence, to avoid the pollution of the sacred fire with human remains. This hermeneutical problem of how literally a text should be taken will return time and again, but Gnostics certainly had a tendency towards the most esoteric and allegorical of interpretations.

---

[6] See Irenaeus of Lyon, *Adversus Haereses*, I 2:4, where the cross is emanated by the Father to reintegrate Pistis Sophia into the Pleroma. This can be also found in Hyppolitus VI 3 and the Acts of John 9, 10, 11.

[7] Baltrusaitis, Jurgis, *La Edad Media Fantástica: antigüedades y exotismos en el arte gótico* (Madrid: Cátedra, 1983).

[8] See: Asín Palacios, Miguel, *Dante y el Islam* (Pamplona: Urgoiti, 2007).

[9] *Oraculos Caldeos: con una selección de testimonios de Proclo, Pselo y M. Itálico. Numenio de Apamea: fragmentos y testimonios*, Introducciones, traducciones y notas de Francisco García Bazán (Madrid: Gredos, 2008), p. 133.

The contradiction is truly an interesting one. For the practice of burial inevitably corresponds to a linear notion of time, where one body and one life will be resurrected when such time comes to an end. Cremation, on the contrary, responds to a circular notion, where the soul is meant to transmigrate as dynamically as possible without the bodily burden. The ascension performed by Elijah and Enoch is ambiguous and in the case of Psellos' commentary, works as a tool for the intersection of both ideas. Christ would often be referred to as a "second Elijah," after also allegedly transcending the grave. And in his figure, the problem between the flesh and the mystical body would later cause immense theological problems.

The left panel is not much concerned with darkness and ignorance but with the promise of liberation. The lion-headed archon rules the labyrinth, and although looking abstruse, there is only one way in or out of it. The pilgrim walks towards Pistis Sophia, winged just as the Virgo Astraea, the goddess of justice who has left the world according to the tradition preserved by Ovid.[10] She points towards a higher realm, the Pleroma where she stems from. The sun is both dark and shining, for it is only an allegory, an illusion in the visible world that should not be mistaken with the principle it represents. She stands among the birds, held by Celsus to be closer to heaven,[11] a tradition kept by many cultures in the language of the birds. Let us not forget the tiny robin, a bird of the new world, which should always remind us of William Blake:

o RNI
THoSCO
PoS

A Robin red breast in a cage
Puts all heaven in a rage.[12]

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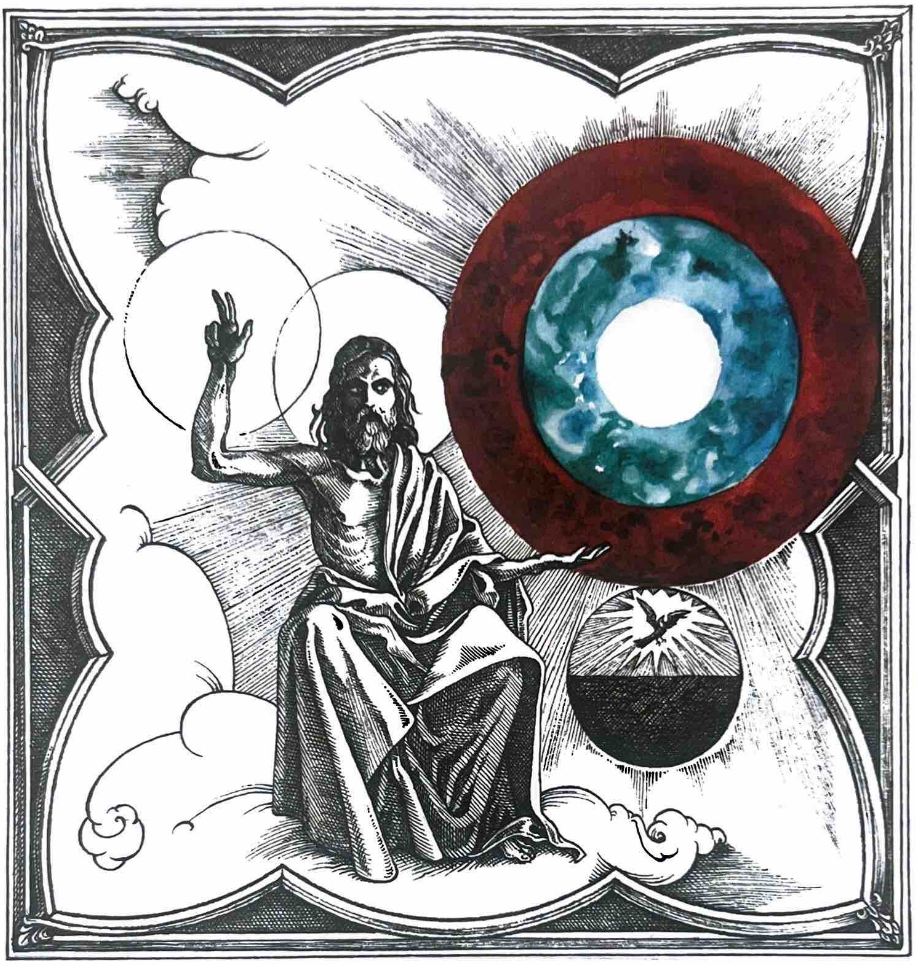
[10] *Metamorphosis*, 1: 149–150.

[11] Origen of Alexandria, *Contra Celsum*, IV: 88.

[12] Blake, William, "Auguries of Innocence," in *English Poetry II: From Collins to Fitzgerald*, *The Harvard Classics* (Massachusetts: P. F. Collier and Son, 1909–14), p. 365.

The pilgrim must learn the subtle language to ascend further, and become an *ornithoscopos*, the diviner of the birds.[13]

In the whole image, one side is the distorted reflection of the other, a logic that could be carried out *ad infinitum*.



The need for a cosmogony is essential in the linear conception of time; it is the main theophany of the past. As this notion was developed throughout the Middle Ages, it became restricted to an extremely limited idea of time and space. A limited world, with limited elements and in a short span of time, that was always expected to end at any point. The modern arrogance of viewing these as the barbaric or naive ideas of an uneducated world misses the point: that all of this aimed to provide a clear map for the soul, which gave an emotional certainty. A map which was minute and limited, held between the unlimited hands of the godhead.

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[13] The symbolism in this panel has previously been explored in the illustrations for Gabriel McCaughry's *(h)Auroræ* (Quebec: Anathema Publishing, 2017). In poetic and visual figures such as the "keen wanderer," the "sun behind the sun," and the language of the birds.

Yet Gnosticism destroys these certainties and reads Genesis in a fully symbolic way. It does not organize or give meaning to the world but does quite the contrary. It cannot provide consolation to the many, only an obscure and eerie revelation for the few. This image is therefore an image of what god is not. A work of negative theology, the kind of which fills this chapter, and which we have resolved to call *Emblems of Ignorance*.

Another recurrent problem within the spiritual history of Christianity has been the denial of the world. The world is first stated as the purposeful creation of a perfect deity, yet this very deity demands of us to reject it, a contradiction which is forced upon us since the fall of Adam. It can only be explained (or simply not explained) as a mystery, the source of all injustice and suffering. This timeless question about the seeming wickedness of the material world never truly stopped. And although Catholicism does not consistently embrace the total rejection of matter, which is considered heresy, such tendency has been undeniably there in the practice of asceticism.

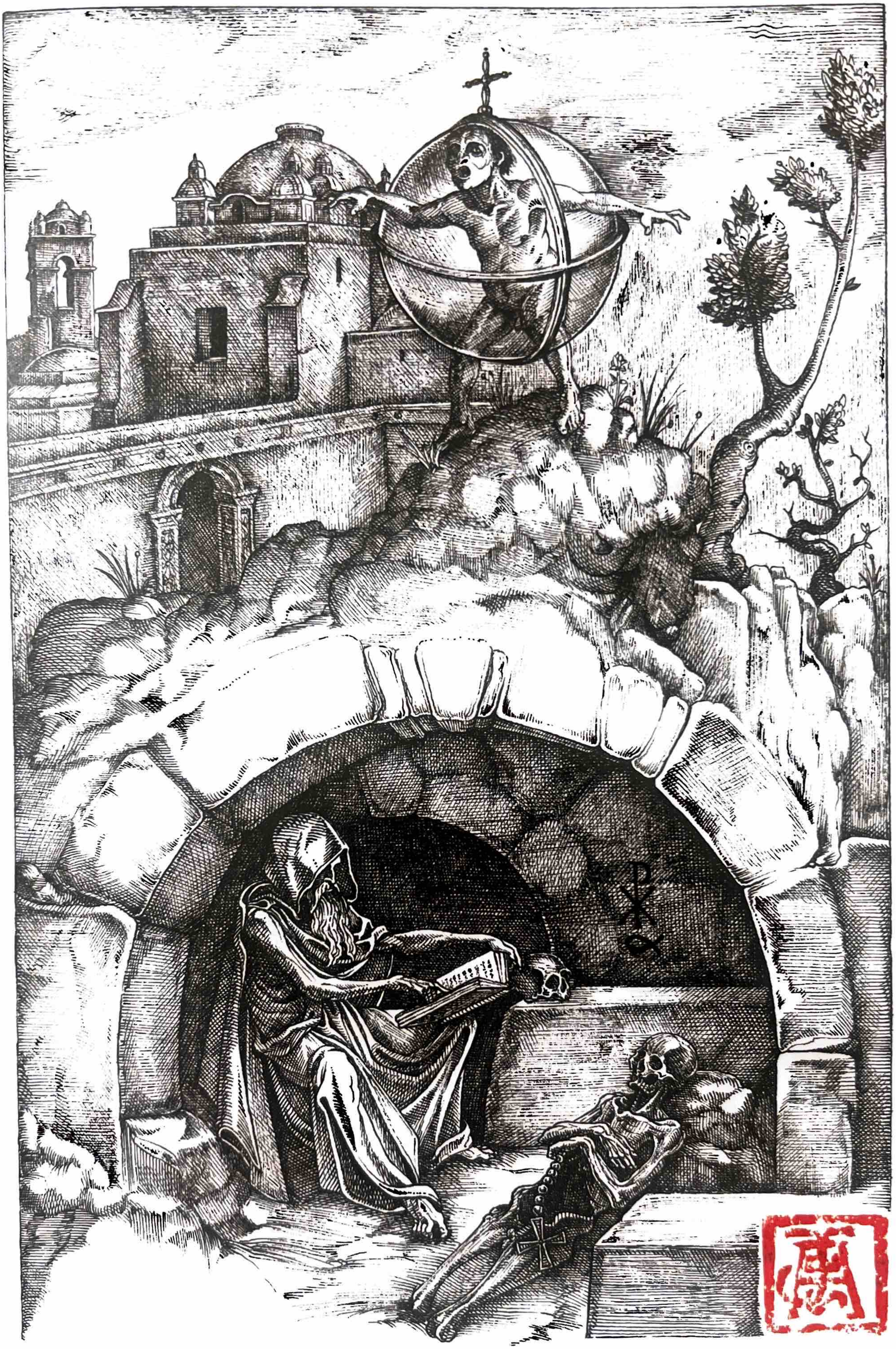
The genealogy of this thought might be traced back to Zoroastrianism, passing through Manichaeism and ending in Catharism. This is, of course, making great simplifications. It is important to acknowledge that this extreme dualism has been attributed to Gnosticism all too often, to explain it and discard it, as yet another dualistic heresy. This has also driven many to consider the Cathars as Gnostics. Yet what we value from it is precisely non-duality.

The Zoroastrian notion of a duo theistic cosmogony, where the world is the work of a wicked god, and the spirit must yearn for an unknown god, manifested in fire and light, is fully consistent with the rejection of the material world. As Gnosticism implies this very idea in the notion of a demiurge versus a higher, unknown god, it is a simple and rather lazy analogy to draw. The spread of Manichaeism in the same years as Gnosticism, and the fact that even Saint Augustine belonged to it, fosters these confusions.

There is an unmistakable tendency to see this world as a cosmic crypt – it is the Christianity of Simon Stylites, which has reached our times in the form of the phantom of radical asceticism and obscure echoes from the medieval mortification of the flesh.

The argument against this lies in a myth preserved by Hyppolitus, where Sophia is, in fact, mentioned as the creator of the world:

> "Sophia works from above, from the *Ogdoad* to the *Hebdomad*. Nothing at all knows, they say, the demiurge, who is senseless



> and foolish, and does not know what he does or elaborates. While he ignored what he was doing, Sophia acted and fortified everything, and, when really it was her who created, the demiurge believed that it was from him that the creation of the world spawned."
>
> Hyppolitus, *Refutatio* VI 33

Irenaeus of Lyon also gathers similar versions of the myth, with some variations, as *Ialdabaoth* calls himself the supreme godhead, creator of all, often directly quoting or purposefully corrupting the text of Genesis, only to be corrected by the voice of his mother, *Achamot*. If he is mentioned as the creator, he is said to ignore the models of all the things he created (a clear hint to Plato). We can therefore call him a deceiver, not a creator, and the denial of this world is partly his will. But even if creation is modelled after a more perfect archetype, we might still be able to infer the greater truth from the study of this world as reflection.

Similar problems of interpretation are found in the *Corpus Hermeticum* as in book VI 4 the world is called the "Pleroma of evil." Yet the same *Corpus* corrects this misunderstanding, stating later that it is only this world that is evil "and not the cosmos, as some blasphemers pretend" (CH IX 4).

None of these denials would be consistent with the sexual symbolism and the celebration of the human form that will appear in both Gnosticism and Hermeticism. Even more so, if we consider alchemy as the daughter of both, let us simply remember that for it, matter is essential. Including and transforming matter, recognizing an infinite potential within it, might very well be the defining trace of the alchemical work.

Yet none of these treatises, doctrines, and books formed a definitive doctrine. Gnostic sects could include a wide range of ideas and interpretations that might not even be able to coexist, and they fall under the same umbrella simply because they are outside the spectrum of orthodoxy. It is us who are choosing the Ophite and the non-dual.

The next emblem of ignorance is Gideon's oracle of war. This is inspired in the iconography from the *Speculum Humanae Salvationis*, to which this book might also be a response, both in image and concept.

The *Specula* drew from a tradition of prefigurations, a manner of discourse based on making parallels between the Old and the New Testament, and how one was the prophecy or culmination of the other. And so, Gideon's oracle of dew was interpreted as a prefiguration of

Mary's annunciation. This was also the case in the older and humbler *Biblia Pauperum*. The Testaments were thus a reflection of one another, a mirror, where prophecy was reflected in revelation. Marcion's lost work, *Antithesis*, showed, on the other hand, all the excerpts where both Testaments were in open contradiction with one another.

Our response is not, as aforementioned, a complete rejection of the Old Testament. It is the consideration that the books are certainly not reflections of one another, yet both are reflections of a higher Pleroma, since it is said that even the demiurge created after greater models, denying them.

Gideon's oracle as a blessing for battle, to defeat the Midianites, is hard to reconcile with the annunciation (Judges VI 37-40), or even with the figure of the Christ according to the canonical gospels. Gideon's god is a tribal god: it exists to grant victory to his people; moral good is what is good to his kin. It is not possible to ever universalize this notion. Unlike Arjuna, he does care about victory or defeat, and so his perspective, even in war, is always a dualistic one.

Gnosticism was also a clear obstacle to Christian claims for universality, or strictly speaking, catholicity, for it relayed heavily on morally ambiguous and esoteric doctrines. Yet the triumphant Church had no problem in embracing dualistic notions for war, which transfigured the material world into a battlefield of good and evil. It is hard for modern Christians to understand the mentality behind the crusades, and figures such as Parsifal have been surrounded by speculations about the possible heresies behind them; yet the holy warrior was at the core of an orthodox medieval discourse that did not contemplate any separation of Church and state. Victory in war was the victory of God, and no ambiguity was possible.

Yet in this Psychomachia, the warrior did not only
fight with the devil. More interestingly, he
also somehow fought with the divine,
to grasp and understand it, as
Jacob wrestled with the
angel at night.

* * *
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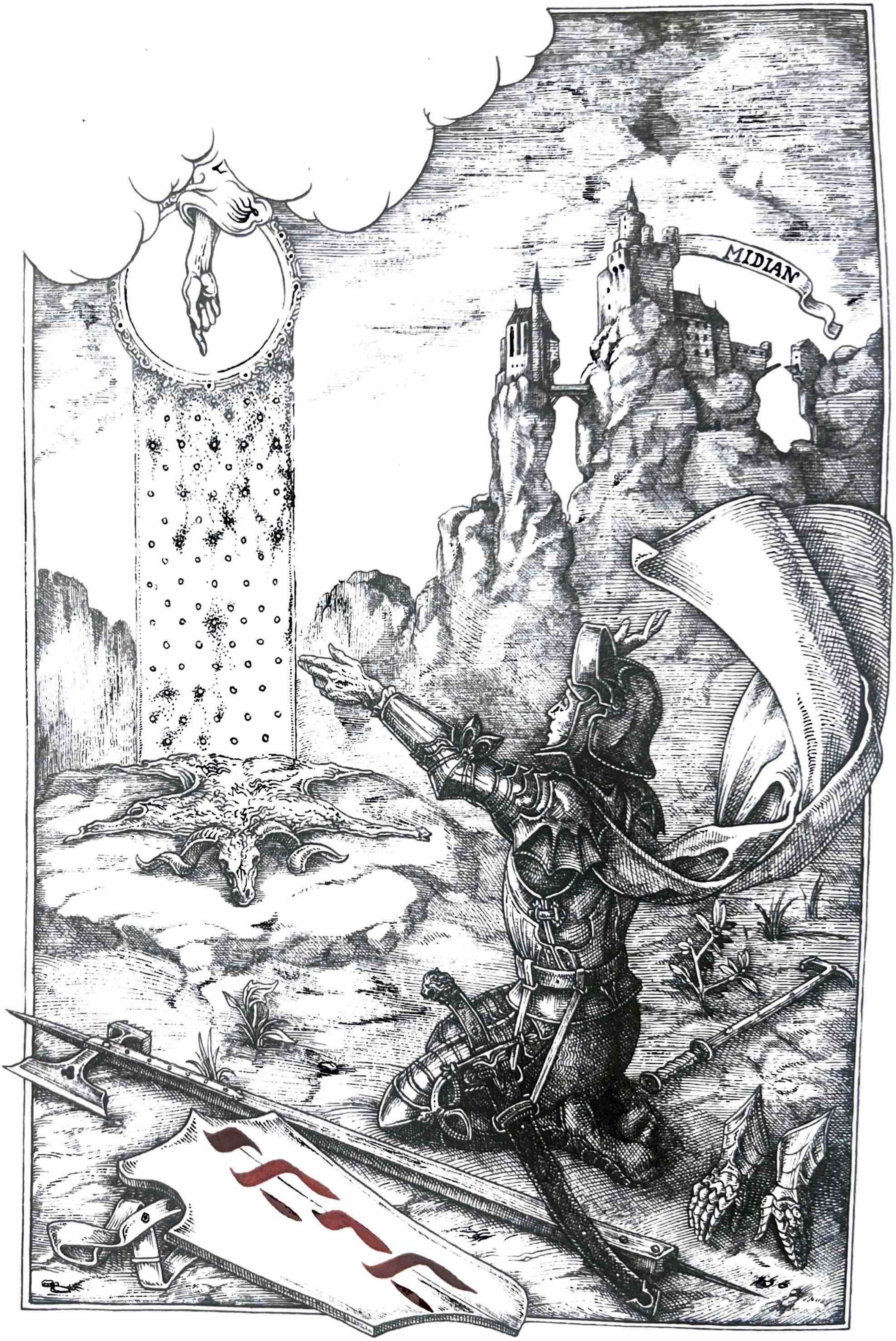
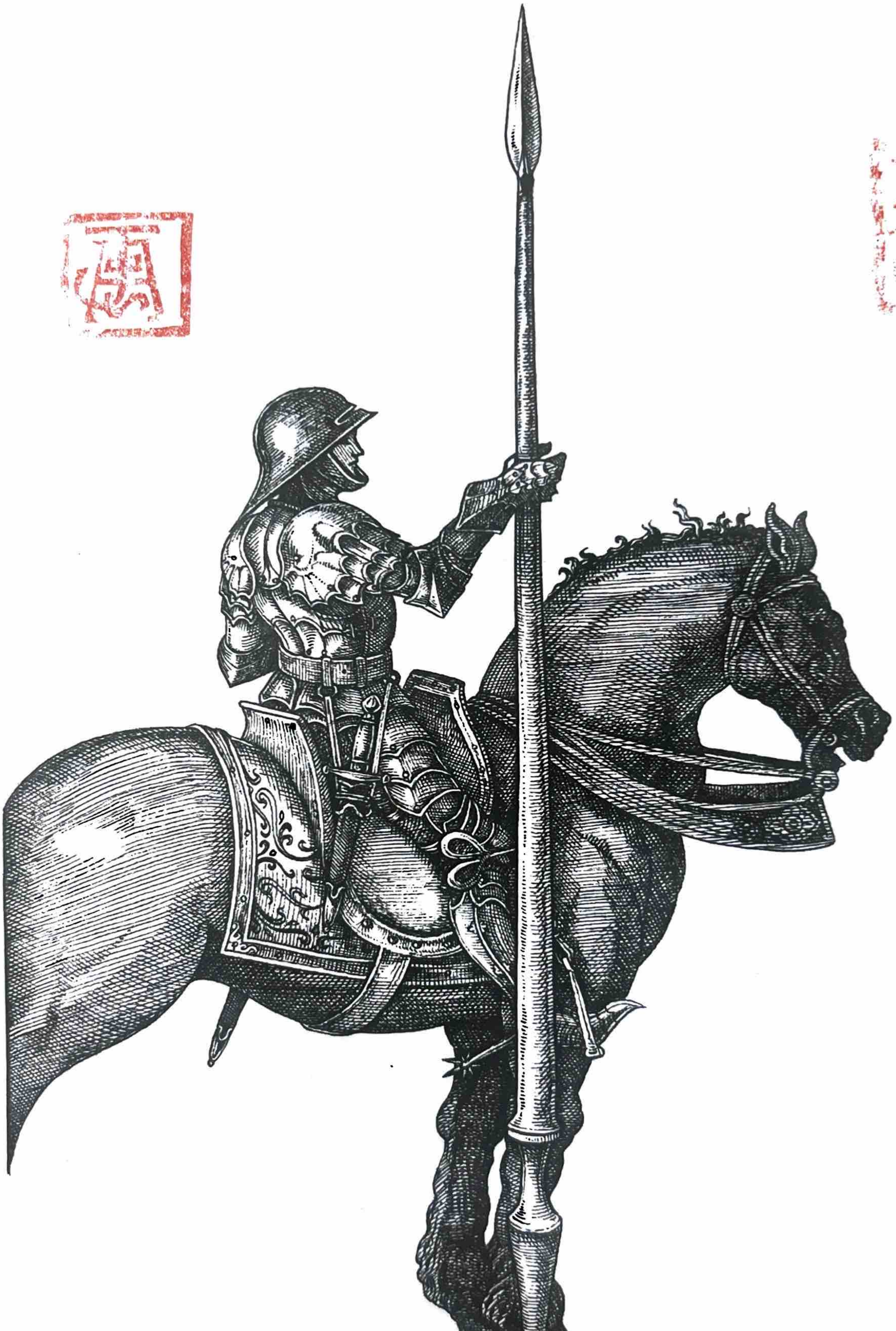
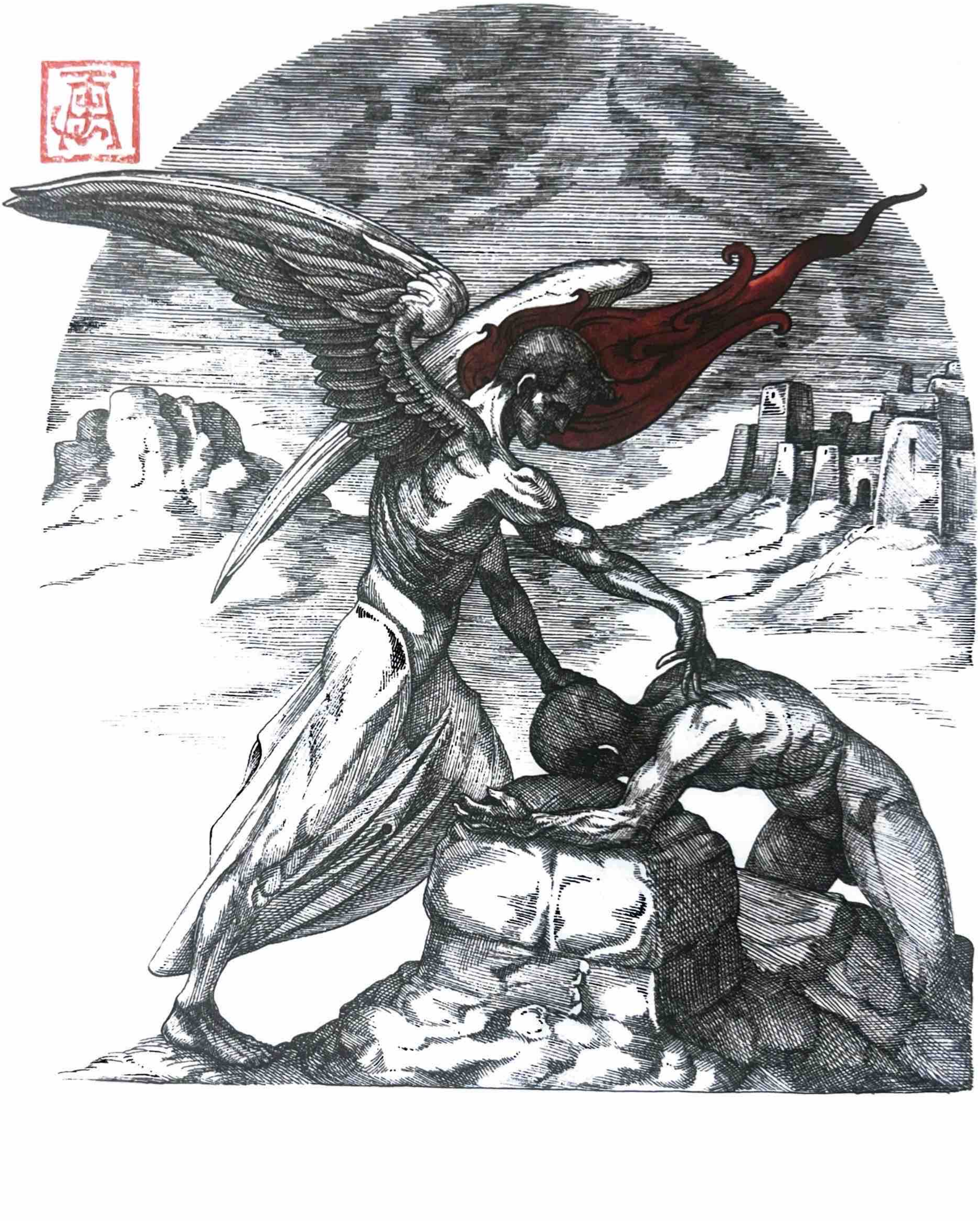
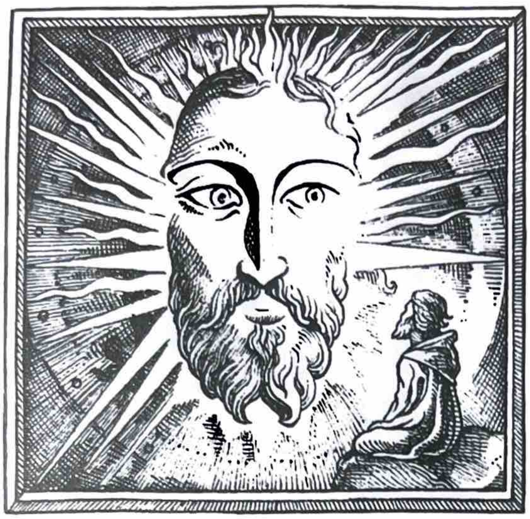

MIDIAN





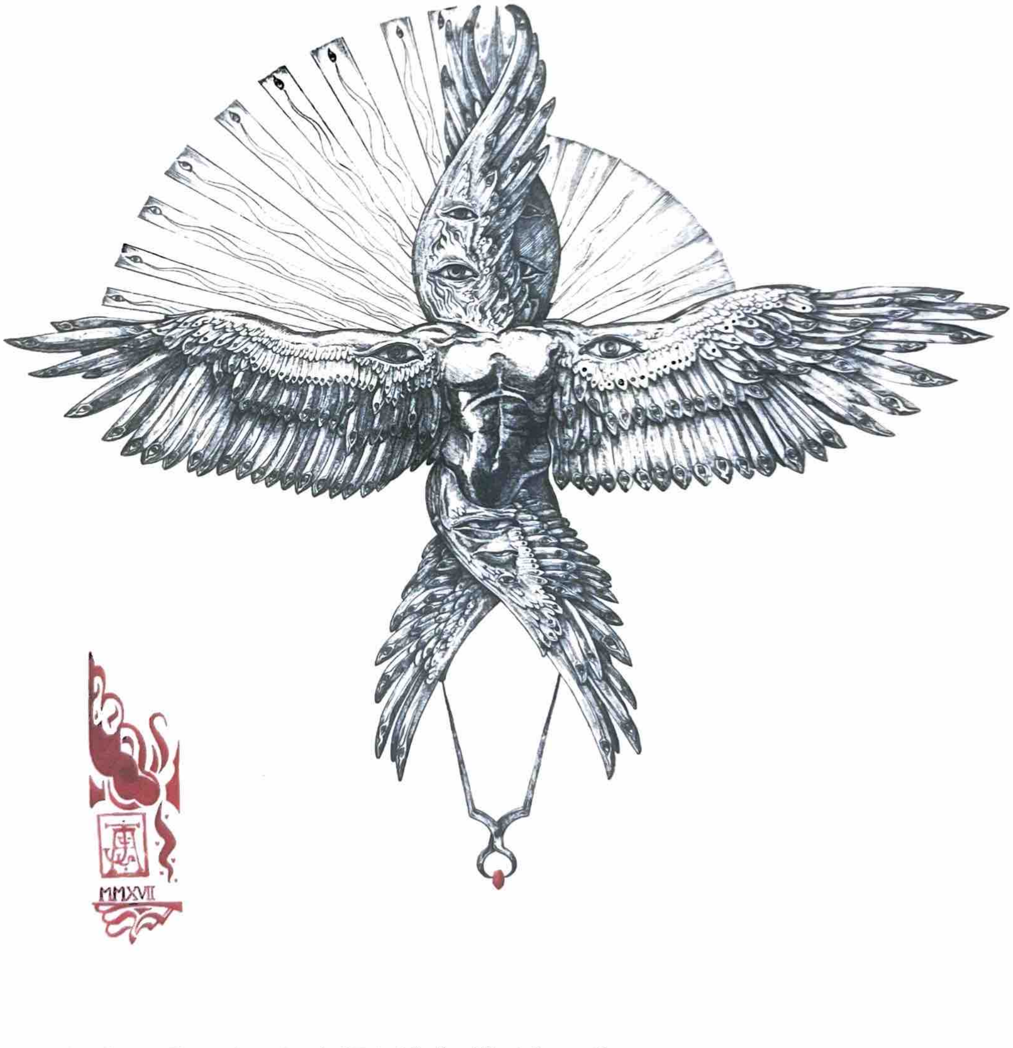


IN THE Middle Ages, man lived absorbed, overwhelmed by the magnitude of the divine. He did not even seek to know god, but to be known by god. The complete surrender and dissolvement in his light. This is expressed in the images that he produced, where there is no emphasis whatsoever in the human shape, but a language for metaphysics that is unmatched. We cannot fully assert that god was perceived in fully human form, even considering the notion of Jesus as *Imago Patris*, the visions that were experienced are of an infinite awe in front of the unknown. We can infer that there was a preference for the solar face as a crystallization of such a sensibility, where man was a minute being in complete contemplation. Augustine encourages the Christian to *seek his face always* (see Psalm 105.4), but this full vision was never possible in this lifetime – it is the promised contemplation for the blessed in heaven. This was pretty much the experience of Isaiah, as the seraphim put burning coal in his mouth, and he thought that after such an experience life was no longer possible. The triple chant of the seraphim was interpreted, again, as prefiguration for the holy trinity. The obsession with the eschatological in such a mindset was not, again, a naive conception of time. It was a product of linear time indeed, which the modern world has inherited in a curious way. Yet it responded to a notion of the divine so imminent and so all encompassing, that history and the world could, in fact, collapse at any moment.

Thus, our next emblem of ignorance is nothing less than the final judgement. We have chosen for it to be represented with the *Vultus Trifrons* enthroned amidst the seraphim, for the triple face would truly fit the Gnostic concept of the demiurge, as being both wonderful and monstrous, a distorted, masculine reflection of the *Trimorphic Protennoia*. Such a figure could very well be read in an eschatological sense, for it could imply that the three faces of the godhead have been already revealed, a thing that could only take place from a perspective that is outside time. The thesis that linked such an iconography with Joaquin de Fiore's theology of history lacks showing evidence from any of De Fiore's writings to prove its point.[14] But as he proposed, three ages of the world identified with the Trinity: namely an age of the Father for antiquity, an age of the Son after the incarnation of Christ, and an age of the Holy Spirit to be manifested in the Eschaton. The three faces of god could very well fit such an apocalyptic narrative, when god would be fully revealed – the final theophany.

Probably the highest mystical doctrine of Christianity is that of the heavenly body, which was the motivation for burial practices and led to the display of the bones and relics of some saints with a high degree of artistry, to show them as they would appear transfigured in glory at the end of times, a great theatre staging the drama of salvation.

The passages inscribed under the following image are Hebrews 10:31, Ezekiel 37:13, and Mathew 24:36.



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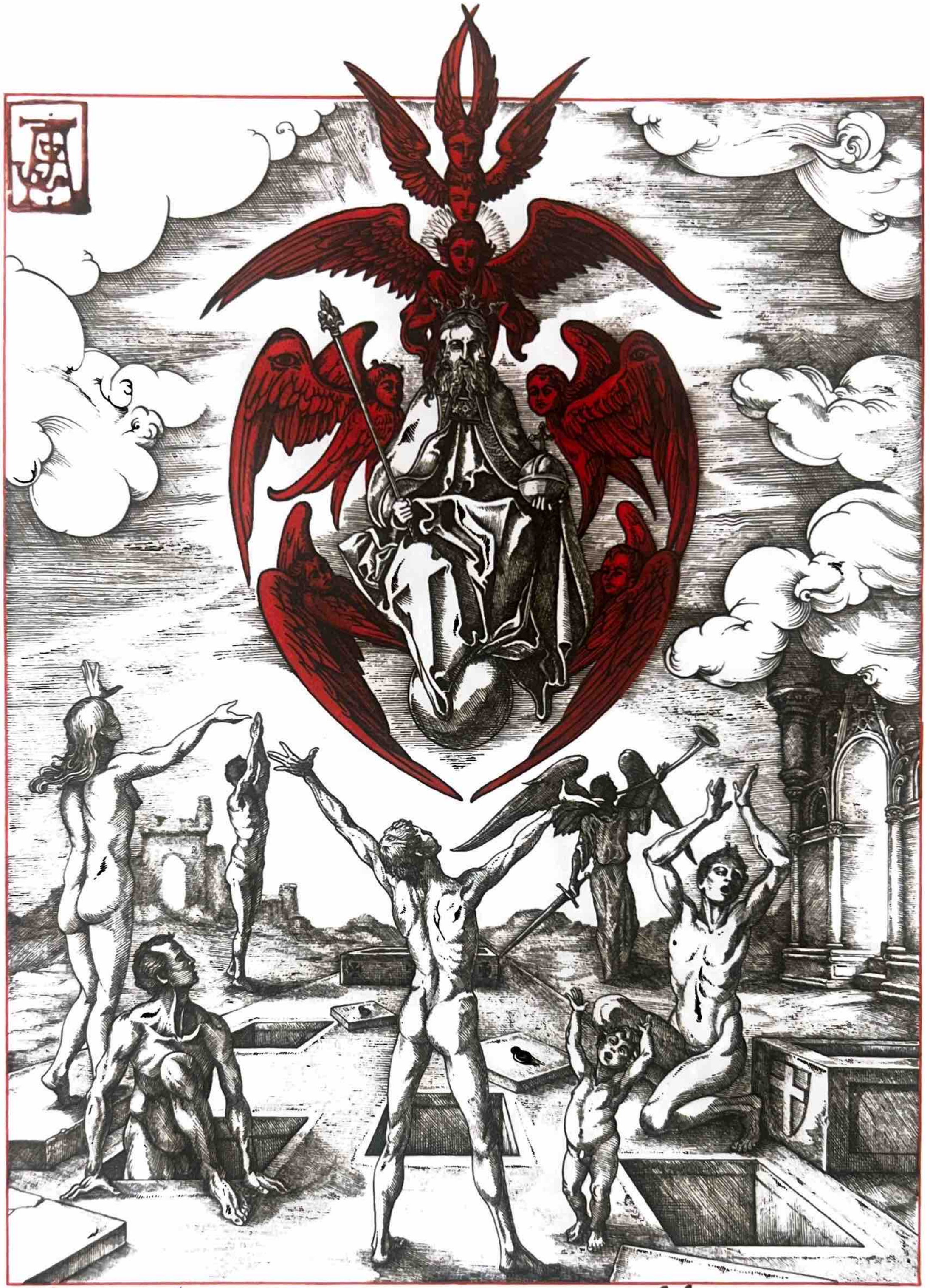
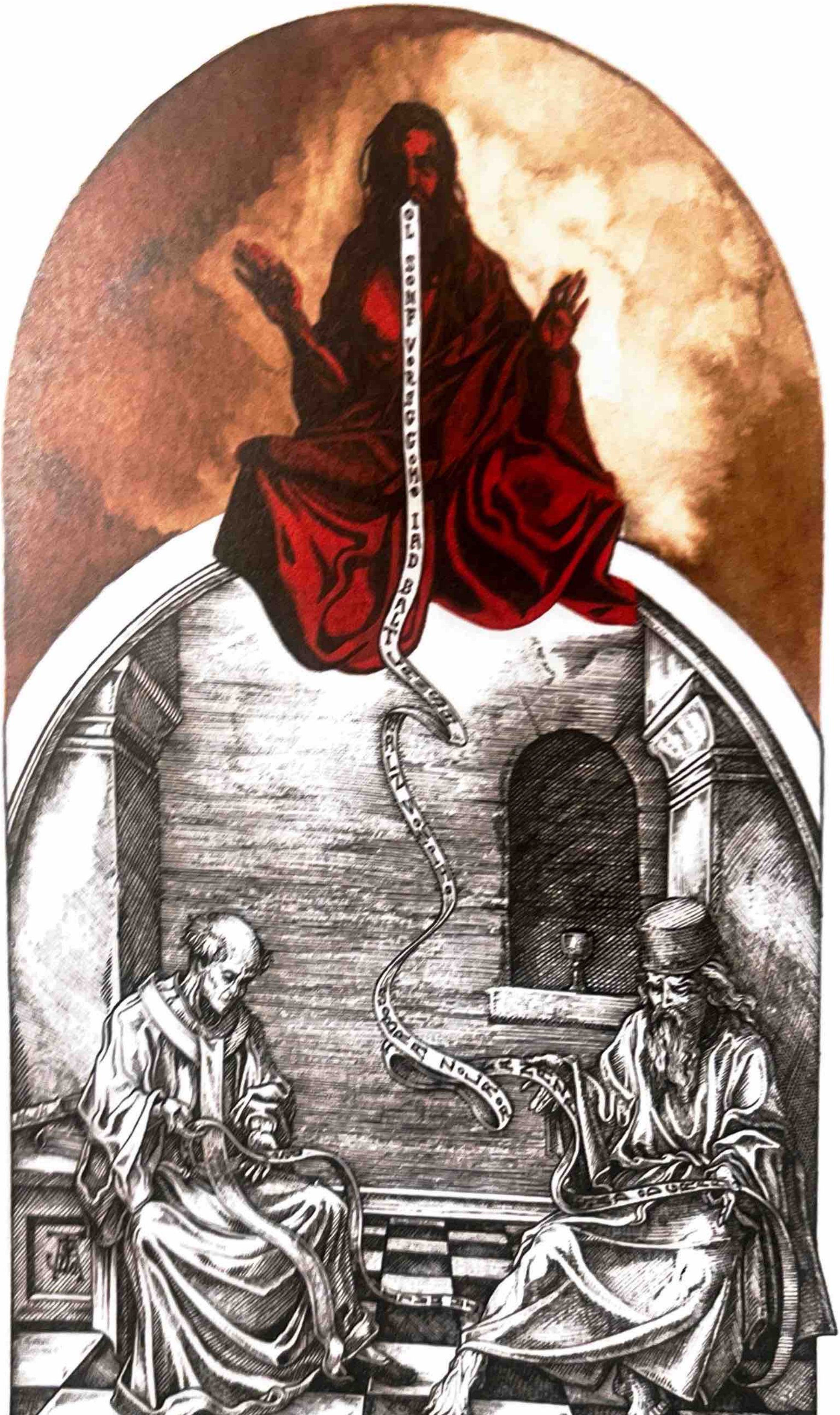
[14] Martinez, Francisco José, "Trinidad trifacial y milenarismo Joaquinita," *Acta/Artis. Estudis d'Art Modern*, 1 (Barcelona: Universitat de Barcelona, 2013).



Horrenda cosa es caer en manos del Dios vivo Heb x.31

Y sabréis que yo soy Jehoua, cuando
abra vuestros sepulcros, y os saque
de vuestras tumbas, pueblo mío. Ez. XXXVII.13

Pero el día y la hora nadie
sabe, ni aun los angeles de los
cielos, sino sólo el Padre. Mt. XXIV.36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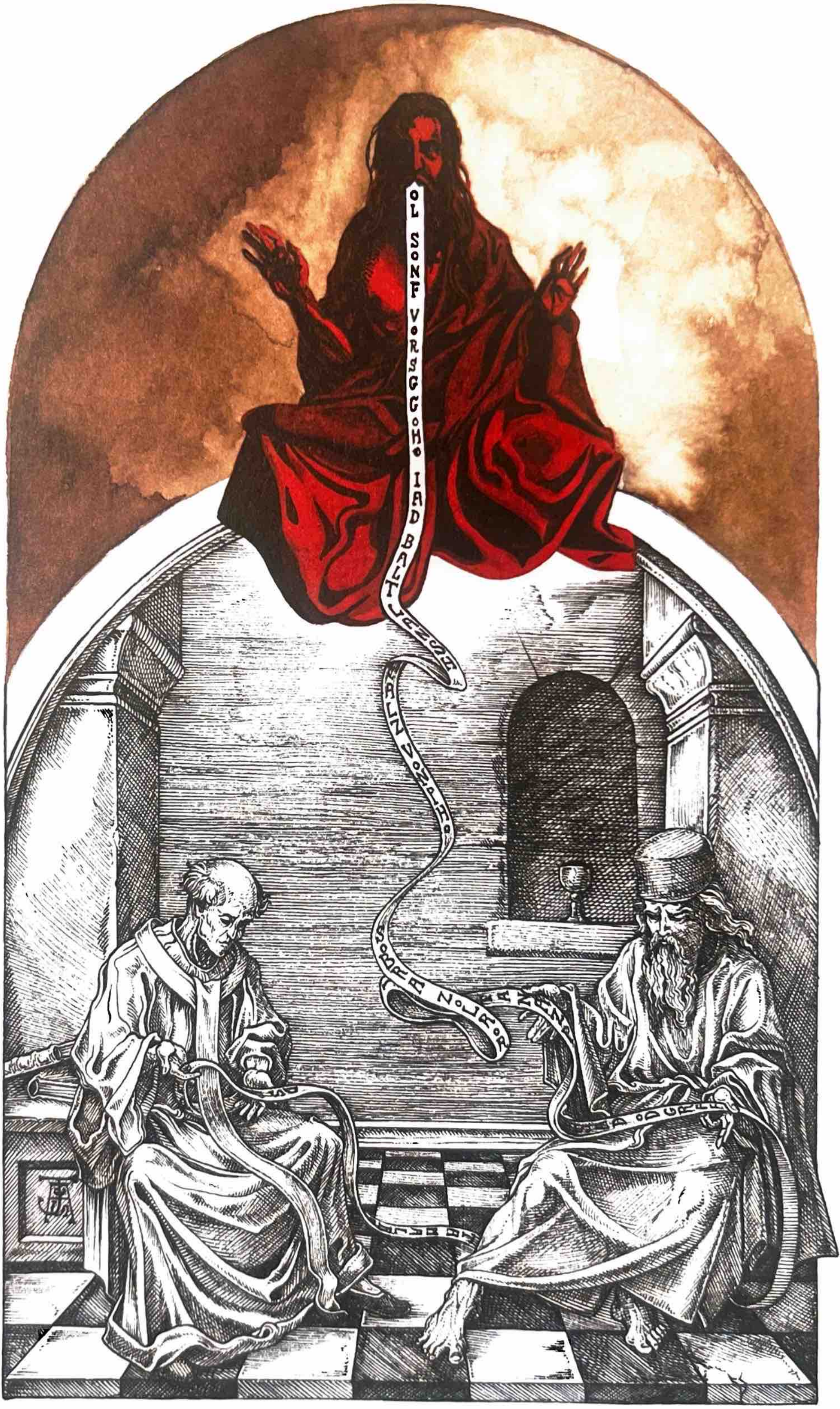
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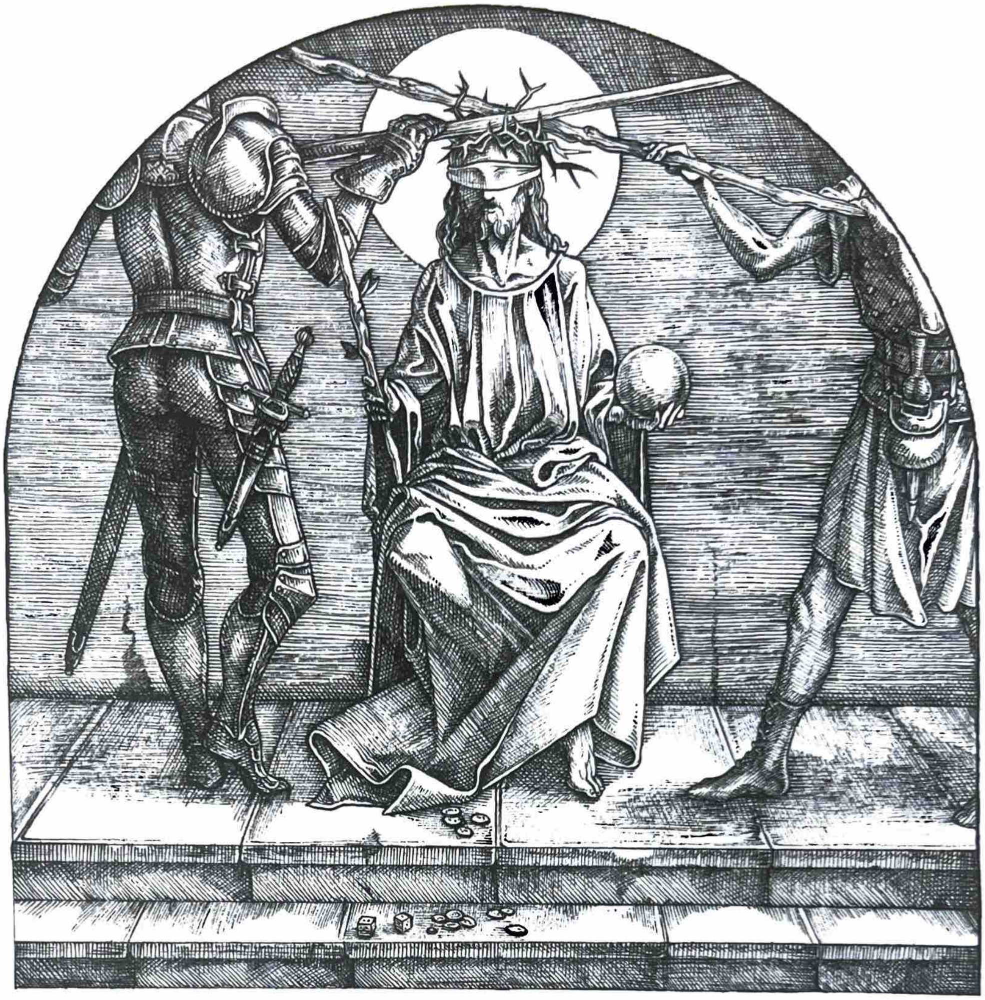
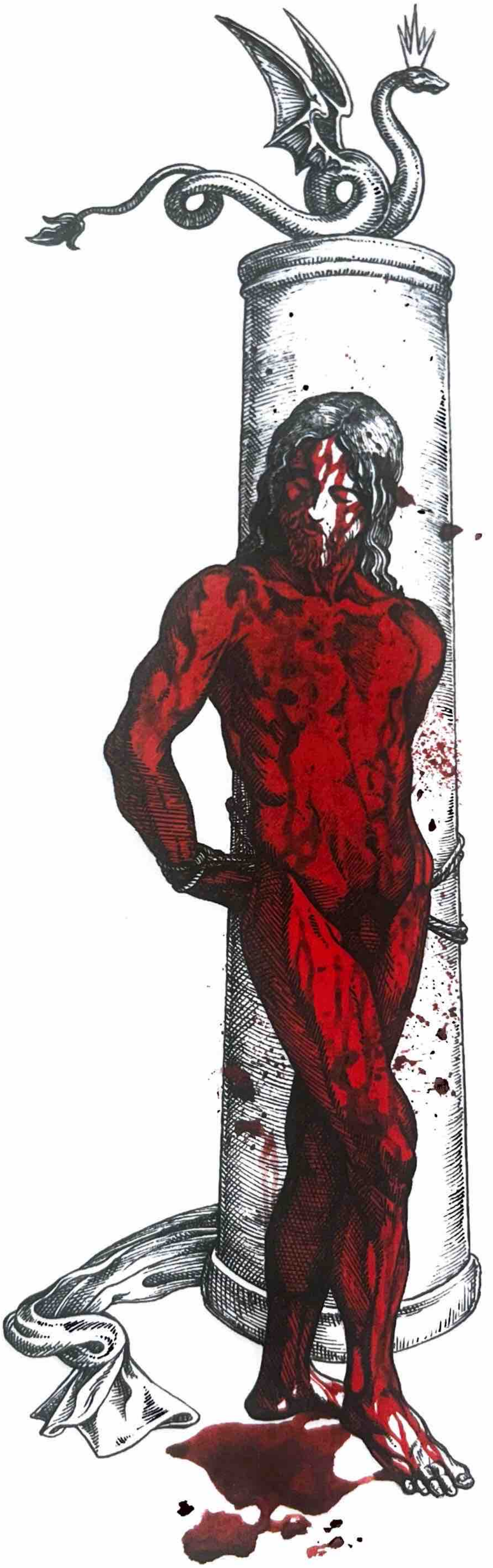


Two exegetes work tirelessly to unravel the testamentary paradoxes. East and West, divided by quarrels on the nature of the Christ, both with reason and faith developed the delicate doctrine of prefigurations. But they are incapable of seeing their own god, drenched in blood as Isaiah saw him (Isaiah 63: 2–4), for they have fallen prey to his words, spoken in many tongues, and worship the book as a god instead.

The son, however, remains unknown, even to those who claim to worship him in the lower aspects. Even his suffering was but a mystery, which men in their idolatry want to materialize in history and in flesh. Did he not say:

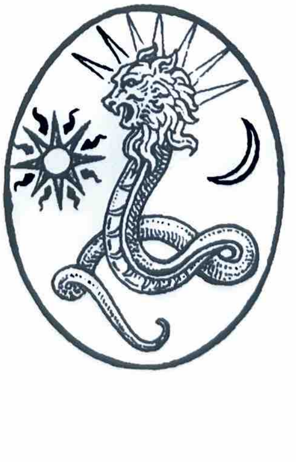
> *"If God were your Father, ye would love me: for I proceeded forth and came from God; neither came I of myself, but he sent me.*
>
> *"Why do ye not understand my speech? Even because ye cannot hear my word. Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your*

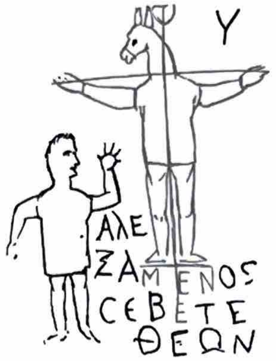


> *father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it."* (John 8:42–44)

In the very Gospel of John we find a Christ that does speak of another god, and describes his enemies as sons of the devil, which contradicts all Christian cosmogony. It also reminds of the narrative in the Secret Gospel of John, where Christ laughs at the ignorance of men and openly denies his suffering and crucifixion, which he describes instead as a dancing mystery. Many later alternative narratives denied the crucifixion, not only within Christian heresies but such is also the Muslim view. Early Byzantine iconography lacks a suffering Christ in a remarkable way, while in the West, it became a distinct feature during the Middle Ages that found its ultimate expression in the Isenheim altarpiece painted by Matthias Grünewald between 1512–1516, where the Christ is not only incarnate, but he has incarnated into a suffering shred of abject flesh.

Incarnate or not, the absence of suffering would frustrate the very core of the Christian message as it has come down to us, and so it makes the Gnostic view even more alien and mysterious to our common religious understanding. It takes the exegesis radically, once again, to the symbolic plane, and such is the Christ which we are trying to depict here, the one who laughs at suffering and embodies a contradiction between what was manifested to the eye and what unfolded in the spirit, with shameless and heroic indifference.





AND SO, we come to the crucifixion. The crucifixion! What a puzzling sight, what a sorrowful vision. It has almost no precedents in ancient Christian art, and it might very well be the hardest concept to grasp for those belonging to other religions. How can the crucifix be defiled? Is it not the ultimate defilement in itself? Therefore, we have chosen an image that might seem blasphemous at first sight but gave it a turn in its favour. The *Alexamenos graffito* has long been interpreted as a blasphemous mockery made by roman soldiers, and at the same time as the first depiction of a crucified Christ. Its only contender could be the *Orpheos Bakkikos*, which has caused even more sad controversies in recent times. Gnosis demands both discipline and disobedience, and so our Alexamenos is both dignifying and irreverent. C. W. King explains it thus:

> "In reality the production of some devout, but illiterate Gnostic, it is construed by its present owners into a shocking heathen blasphemy, and a jibe upon the good Christian Alexamenos, because they mistake the jackal's head for that of an ass, and consequently imagine a caricature of their own Crucifix."[15]

He identifies it instead as a mixture of Christ and Anubis, both holding the role of *Psychopompos*, which also coincides with Hermes, whom was also, in late Alexandrian syncretism, depicted as Cynocephalus. This should be taken as a compliment, for ancient Christianity was not devoid of magical and so-called "heathen" elements (if we even agree that Catholicism ever ceased being heathen, which personally the author does not.) The relationship with ancient wisdom, as the prefigurations confirm, was not seen as a hindrance but a confirmation that could defend this new faith in the debates of the ancient world. Gnosticism makes abundant use of syncretic elements from many, even too many religions of antiquity, trying to find ultimate meaning in the form of a formless, unknowable god. This, amid a hyperabundance of pantheons, gods, and idols.

On the interpretation of this graffito as showing the head of an ass, King explains that there are precedents in Epiphanius stating that

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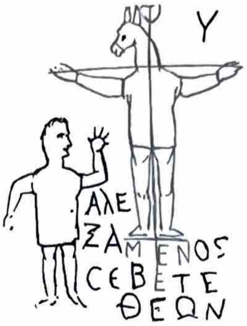
[15] King, C. W. *The Gnostics and their Remains, Ancient and Mediaeval* (London: David Nutt, 1887), p. 230.



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[15] King, C. W. *The Gnostics and their Remains, Ancient and Mediaeval* (London: David Nutt, 1887), p. 230.

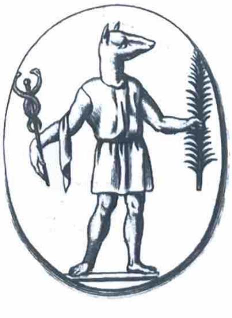
"the Gnostic Sabaoth has, according to some, the face of an Ass."[16] He also lists mentions of such a belief recorded by Tertulian and Pliny.

Thus, in our interpretation we do not seek to represent the demiurge, but the Christ. Making use of its most ancient iconography, *the production of some devout, but illiterate Gnostic.*

We wanted to contrast this with its opposite: Longinus, the roman soldier known for being the killer of Jesus. Alexamenos worships and Longinus kills, discipline, and disobedience...

Yet, according to later legends, Longinus would become a devout Christian and a saint himself, having realized the divinity of Christ by having first contact with the holy blood himself, by slaying him. His realization also goes hand in hand with the ominous events that are said to have taken place after Jesus' death, such as the earthquake or the darkening of the sun (Luke 23:44–45), or even the resurrection of holy men who walked out of their graves to preach (Mathew 27:52–53). Jacob was defeated by the angel, yet Longinus kills the Messiah, and even this ultimate act of transgression serves as the mysterious means for metaphysical realization.

We wanted to depict some controversial elements on the cross, where painting met with theology, such as the *titulus* in three languages, or the four nails. The titulus follows the redaction used by Francisco Pacheco in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin, used in his sculpture known as the *Cristo de la Clemencia* (1603-1606). The erudite painters of the Baroque engaged in an authentic quarrel on these matters, for the veracity of the depicted crucifix was of utmost importance to them but could also lead to idolatry. They tried in vain to find a primordial icon of the crucified Christ, when, in fact, there is none; some even tried to condemn representations with three nails as heretical, when it was instead a purely aesthetic choice.[17]



Amulet depicted in *Joannis Macarii, Abraxas, seu Apistopistus*, 1657, plate XIII, GIA Library.

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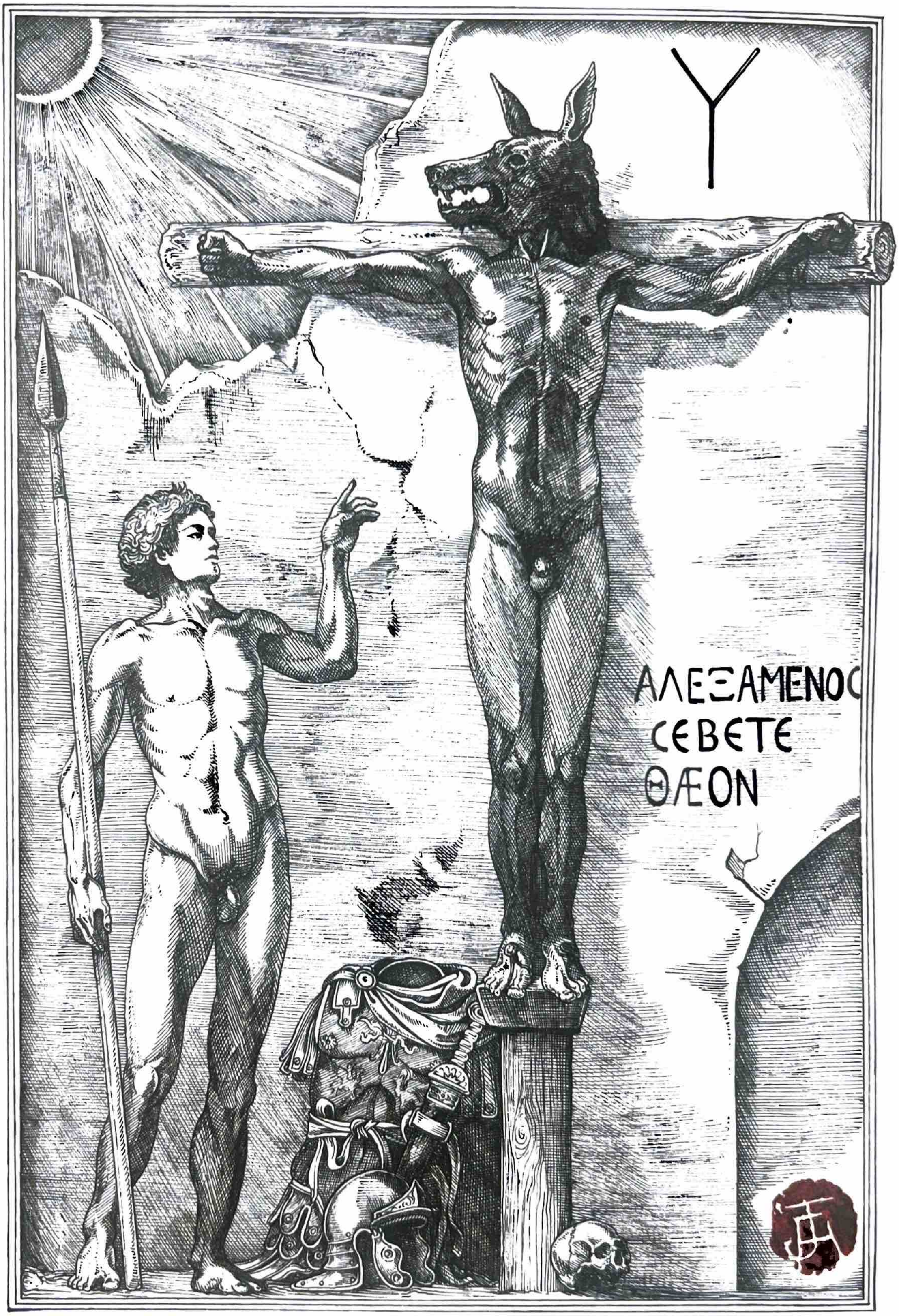
[16] Ibid., p. 230.

[17] All these aspects are discussed in: Pereda, Felipe, *Crimen e ilusión: el arte de la verdad en el siglo de oro* (Madrid: Marcial Pons, 2017).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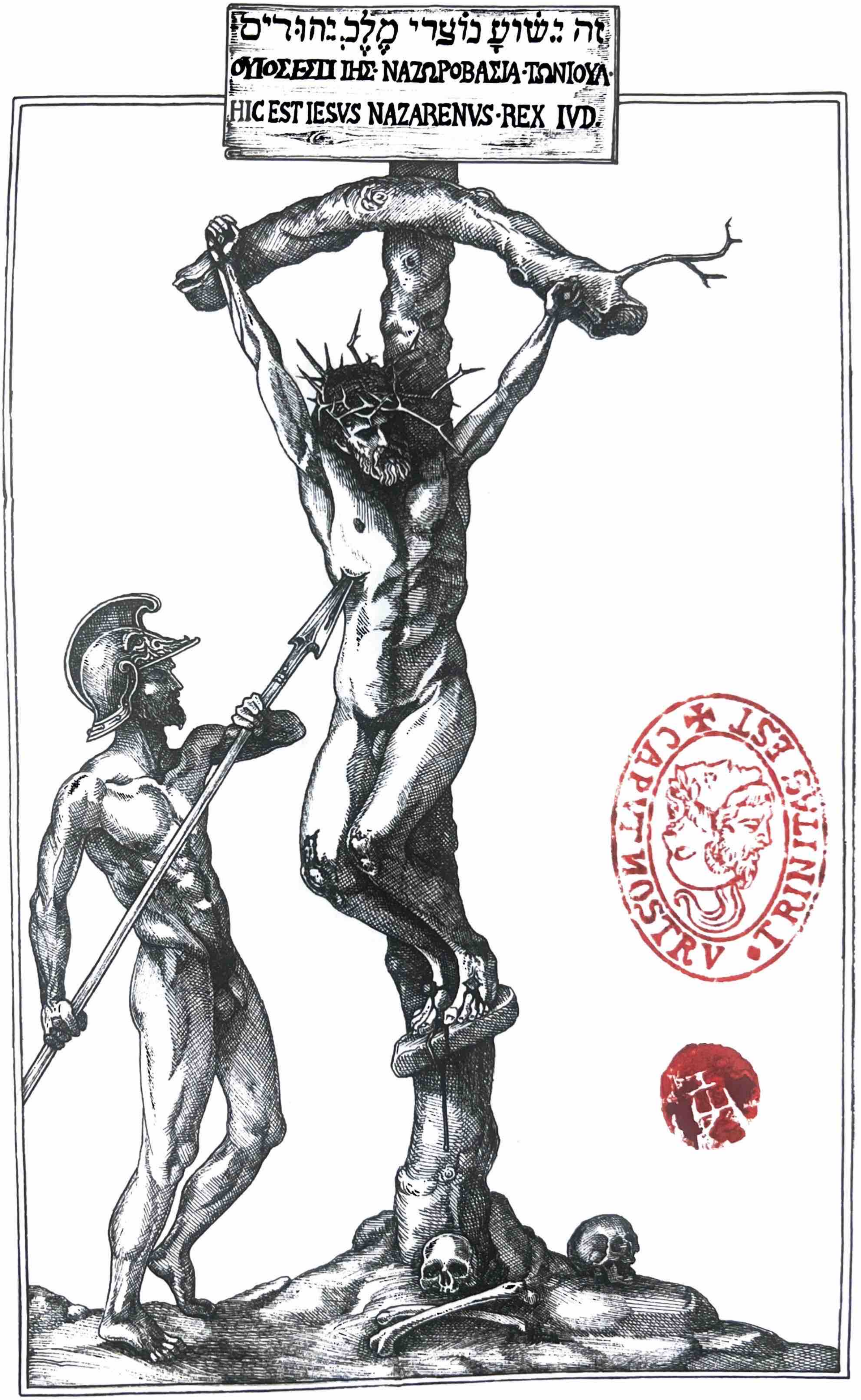
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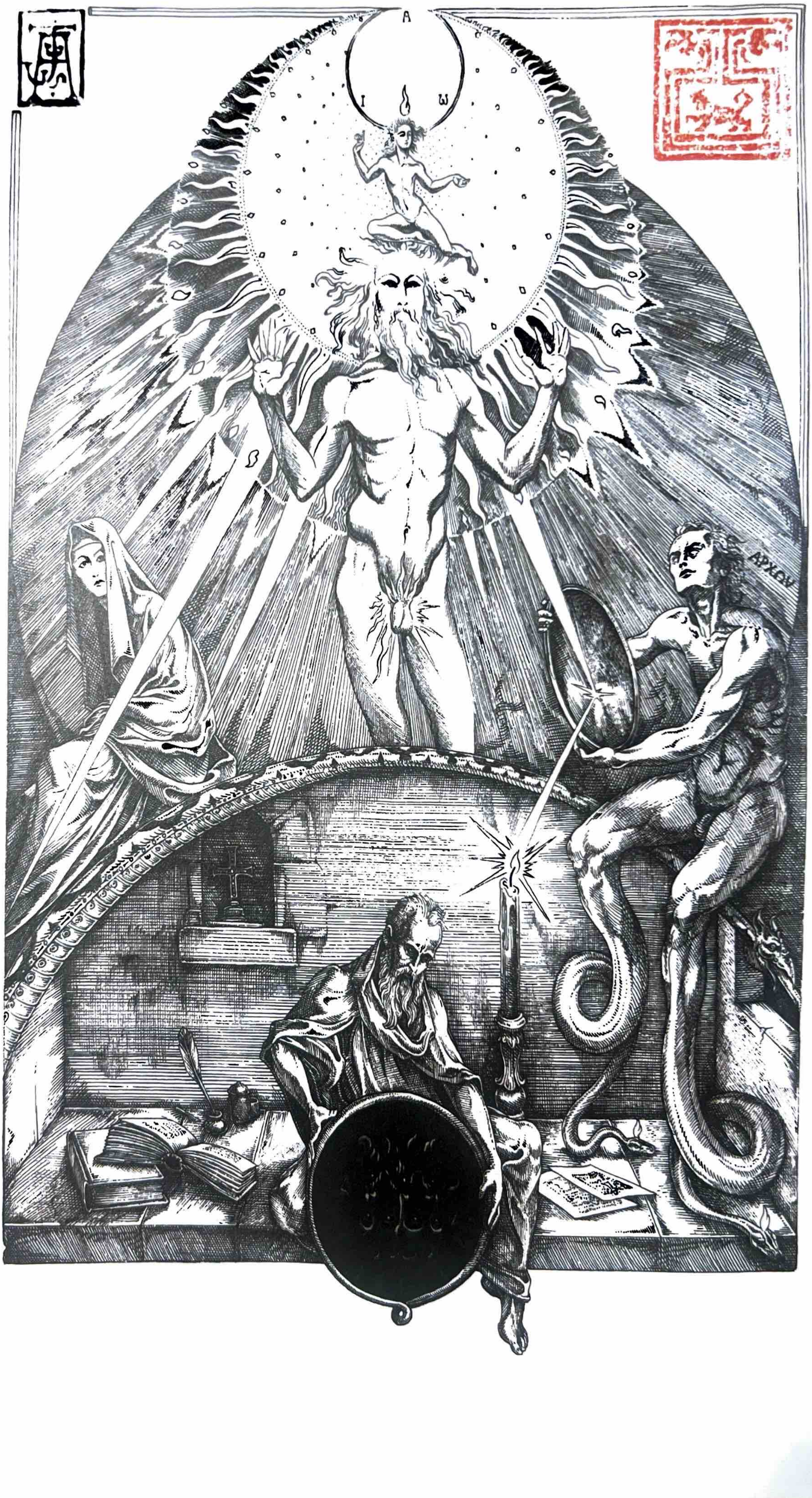
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ΑΡΧΩΝ

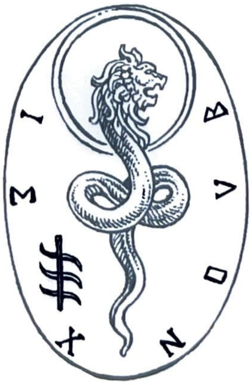
SUCH are the emblems of human ignorance. Man reflects the face of god in a distorting mirror, mistaking it for the *vera icon*, and worships a monstrous simulacrum.

> *For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.*
>
> (1 Corinthians 13:12)

This distorted reflection is also what happened *in illo tempore* when "the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters." (Genesis 1:2)

The demiurge is His obscure reflection on such waters, which acquired an ego and lived to satisfy his lower self. The doctrine of demonic plagiarism developed by Justin Martyr helps us understand this notion, and the world as representation and reflection. It is said that Lucifer copied that which he initially saw in the presence of god, and in this way, he deceives men by revealing to them barbarous and idolatrous parodies of Christianity. Although this might be a lie, there lies within it a great truth. For it is the demiurge who copied such models – the ones he saw in the perfect intellect of the Pleroma – and fashioned this flawed world in imitation of that. Or perhaps not even that – perhaps it was the work of Sophia. This is a contingent reflection of transcendent truth.

Even the light reflected in the mirror held by the Archon can ignite a candle. Yet still, man looks away. Sophia has stepped out of the Pleroma, thus initiating her fall and the subsequent myth. She does not depend on her father, however; they are only shown thus, since both belong to the greater hermaphrodite, which dwells in the Pleroma, unuttered, unseen. The lightning in the perfect mind.



II

SOPHIANIC FIGURES

OF THE FEMALE VISIONS OF THE DIVINE, CRYSTALLISATIONS OF SACRED KNOWLEDGE.

OUR imaginary notion of the godhead is without a doubt influenced by the *ancient of days* from the vision of the prophet Daniel. All ancient polytheisms had goddesses; however, it seems to be a defining feature of self-defined monotheism for the one god to be a fatherly figure. Gnosticism revolts against the figure of the Father god with various degrees of radicalism. Now that we have undergone an exposition of the Emblems of ignorance, it is time to move forward from negative theology, now that we have defined what god is not.

From among the different monotheistic faiths, their heresies, offspring, and variations, it is only within Gnosticism that we find the resurgence of female notions of the divine. They are, without a shadow of a doubt, reappearances of ancient goddesses. In the cult of the Virgin Mary, this genealogy is not hidden either, but the reluctance and recurrent debate around its immaculate conception show how there has been a consistent and conscious effort to keep the goddess away, so to speak. The "virgin" attribute is only one of the many facets that goddesses can adopt, but it was left as the only one remaining, for it was passive, easy to submit to the greater male figure of god. The debate around her immaculate conception rests not so much in the notion of purity itself, but in the fear that this miraculous birth might confer her a messianic role as a second Eve, just as the Christ was thought of as a second Adam.

Our first image of the goddess is veiled, hidden. The veil is a prominent attribute of the goddess that works as an allegory for the knowledge that is yet to be discovered and realized. Legend has it that the Virgin Mary as a child helped knitting the veil for the temple of Jerusalem – the same that would be ripped at Christ's death. It is such an essential attribute of Isis that Blavatsky named one of her most famous works after it. It should be evident for the reader that nudity is not a problem in these images, and no prudery has been tolerated to please puritanical readers. Therefore, it is hoped that the gradual unveiling of the goddess in these images might be read in its symbolic aspect, as they will progress from the most abstract forms of representation towards the most explicit and comprehensive, such as the vision of Marcus the Magus.

The beginning is not knowledge, but the intuition of the unknown. The fully veiled goddess, as the moon behind a cloud, a hint in the sky, yet the sleeping ones cannot perceive her. The feeling of absolute otherness and alienation occurs to many mystics: it is the longing for the divine when it has finally been perceived but not fully grasped or understood.

As Rudolf Otto expresses it, the feeling towards the divine is one of terror and awe, yes, but it is also one of absolute fascination. This *fascinans* element is what drives men to long but also to hide the divine experience like a dangerous treasure. Such a contradiction lies at the core of the mystical experience.

The feeling of absolute otherness, the *Xeniteia,* is what the *Cloud of Unknowing* speaks of, and what John of the Cross experienced in his *Dark Night of the Soul.* How then, do other texts speak of an essential unity of the human soul and god? This is because the part of the soul that holds the divine spark is not the same that is known by men in everyday life. Often, they ignore it completely, and the first experience of the divine is therefore one of utmost surprise.

The deepest self-identification with the godhead and the ultimate union are things to be achieved after a lifetime (or many lifetimes) of work. They are not to be taken as a given. The natural state tends to be that of the sleeping ones, even in highly religious societies, because experience is a different land; it is uncharted territory, it is the body of the deity that is to be discovered, like Psyche knew her lover, Eros, in darkness.

A fascinating description of this is given in the *Gospel of Truth,* where the ignorant are described as if they were *submerged in sleep, and coexisting with disturbing dreams,* but *the knowledge of the Father is appreciated like dawn.*[1]

A similar comparison is found in the *Corpus Hermeticum* I:27: "Woe to you, men sons of the earth, who are plunged into drunkenness, into dreaming, and the ignorance of God."

It should be enough to remind us that awakening is the central allegory of Buddhism as a whole. Although the world for the ignorant may seem like a dark sea of suffering, it is precisely because of his own ignorance that it seems so. This is the mistake that differentiates Vimalakirti from the harsh and austere Shariputra.[2] The latter is still attached to the world despite his discipline, for he is trapped in duality.

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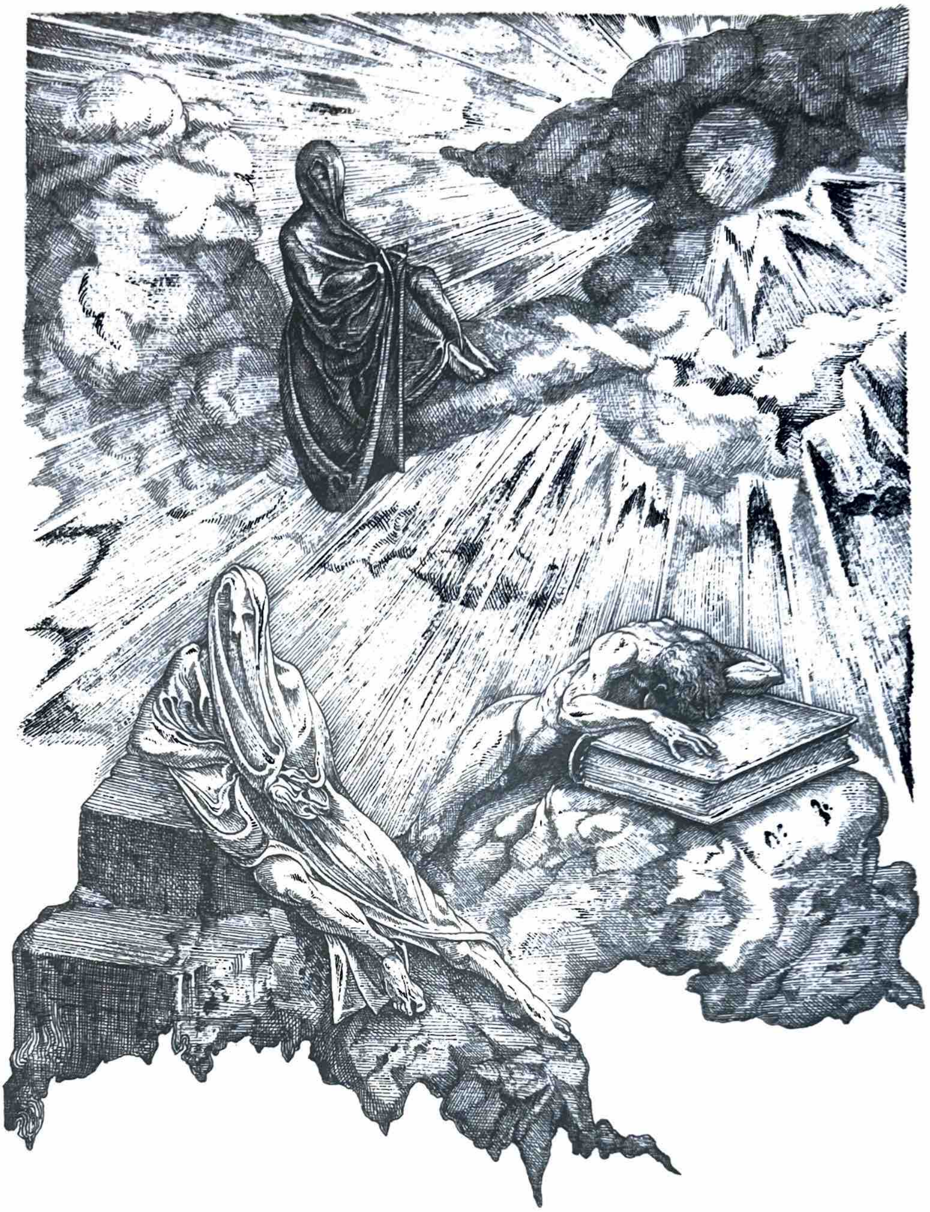
[1] BNH II, 153–154.

[2] *Vimalakirtinirdesha: La enseñanza de Vimalakirti.* Traducción del sánscrito al español con Introducción y Notas por Carmen Dragonetti y Fernando Tola (Buenos Aires: FIEB, 2018), p. 178.



This aspect of confrontation, from a state of ignorance towards knowledge and ascension, is perhaps why some of the most notable travels of the soul and the imagination begin in Hell or the underworld. Orpheus must descend to Hades before he can be admitted into the realm of the gods, and Dante is mysteriously forced to undergo a complete journey of Hell before he can enter even Purgatory, not to mention the heavens. This seems to be the case with Milton whom, according to Blake, "wrote in fetters when he wrote of Angels & God, and in liberty when of Devils & Hell,"[3] as his *Paradise Lost* is so much larger and superior to his *Paradise Regained.* Most importantly, Christ was said to descend to Hell first, in the day in which he was dead, a narrative that is interestingly explored in apocryphal Gospels. This pattern of travelling through dark and haunted realities is what we shall see in the Ophite Diagram, as the initiate is expected to open the gates of the Archons. It also implies an interesting metaphysical problem: the idea that there might be numinous realities superior to ours, that are still deceitful, vicious, and lacking in transcendence. The world is therefore not the only place that deceives us by the senses, but there might be many layers of darkness and ignorance, with their own deities, as reflections on the countless bits of a broken mirror. This is perhaps one of the deepest underlying fears of such a worldview: the fear of worshipping a mistaken god.

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[3] Blake, William, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, plate 6, in Blake, William, *The Complete Illuminated Books* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2000), p. 112.

During the Reformation, a dispute aroused on the nature of salvation. Some argued that it was to be achieved by faith alone, others that it was gained with deeds, and the place of intermediary objects like relics and ex-votes was at stake. Yet knowledge played no role in this. Only for the Gnostics this has been the case, that man is to be saved by knowledge of a mystical kind, and not all men, but only a few. Not by idols, nor by impoverishing fanaticism, but by a faith in knowledge, and this is how the very title of *Pistis Sophia* can be interpreted.

The man sleeping on the book shows that the nature of such a knowledge is not theoretical, and that "words should not become Gods"[4] – a phrase that Jung fantastically but fittingly attributes to the anchorite *Ammonius*, a character inspired by Philo Judaeus.

The other sleeper is veiled for he is, still in his ignorance, alike the goddess in his deepest nature. He is veiled for he does not know himself; the veil is not only on the goddess, but it is also what clouds his vision.

The Sophia Myth

THERE are many records of the Sophia Myth and we will not be comprehensive in the analysis of their variations. What is striking is the lack of imagery, and this is what the present work will somehow try to compensate. The most complete and fascinating development of an imagery and symbolism for the female perception of the divine can be found in the ten *Mahavidyas*, the name of which literally means "great knowledge." Yet they follow a cultural history, and spring like a flower from a breeding ground so different from ours, that adopting them crudely would lead us nowhere.

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[4] Jung, C. G. *The Red Book*, Edited by Sonu Shamdasani (New York: Norton, 2009), p. 268.

Our illustration of it will mostly rest on the version recorded by Irenaeus and the *Pistis Sophia*. It tells of things that never took place on this Earth, emanations from emanations, an abstract and almost incomprehensible tale of what happened outside of time. It might be the finest example of how Gnostic myths detach themselves completely from the need of historicity that weighs so heavily upon the Christian understanding of time as a theophany. As the pagan theologian Salust beautifully puts it when interpreting myths, "these events never happened, and yet they always exist."[5]

The myth of Sophia is told, in the *Pistis Sophia*, by the resurrected Christ, whom in this transfigured form - almost entirely made of light - reveals esoteric teachings to the apostles. Both here and in the account by Irenaeus we find a highly abstract cosmogony, where the Hermaphrodite Father known as *Barbelo*, emanates Silence and then a list of Aeons. The names and numbers of Aeons do not coincide in any Gnostic writing,[6] which indicates strong variations in the bosom of a tradition, teachings imparted by mystagogues that might be independent from each other.

Either way, Sophia is described as the last, the youngest, and most perfect Aeon, who experienced passion without her spouse. This can be interpreted as her, the female aspect, breaking away from the greater hermaphrodite. Her fall from grace is what leads to the creation of the demiurge and the world. She thus "gave birth to a formless substance"[7] which we have chosen to depict as the three-faced reflection of the godhead, to keep it consistent with our own proposal. In the Apocryphon of John, which can be interpreted as an earlier version, it is explained that such a creation was incomplete and of a dreadful aspect because it had been made without her consort. Thus, the demiurge and the world are the product of an interesting parthenogenesis.

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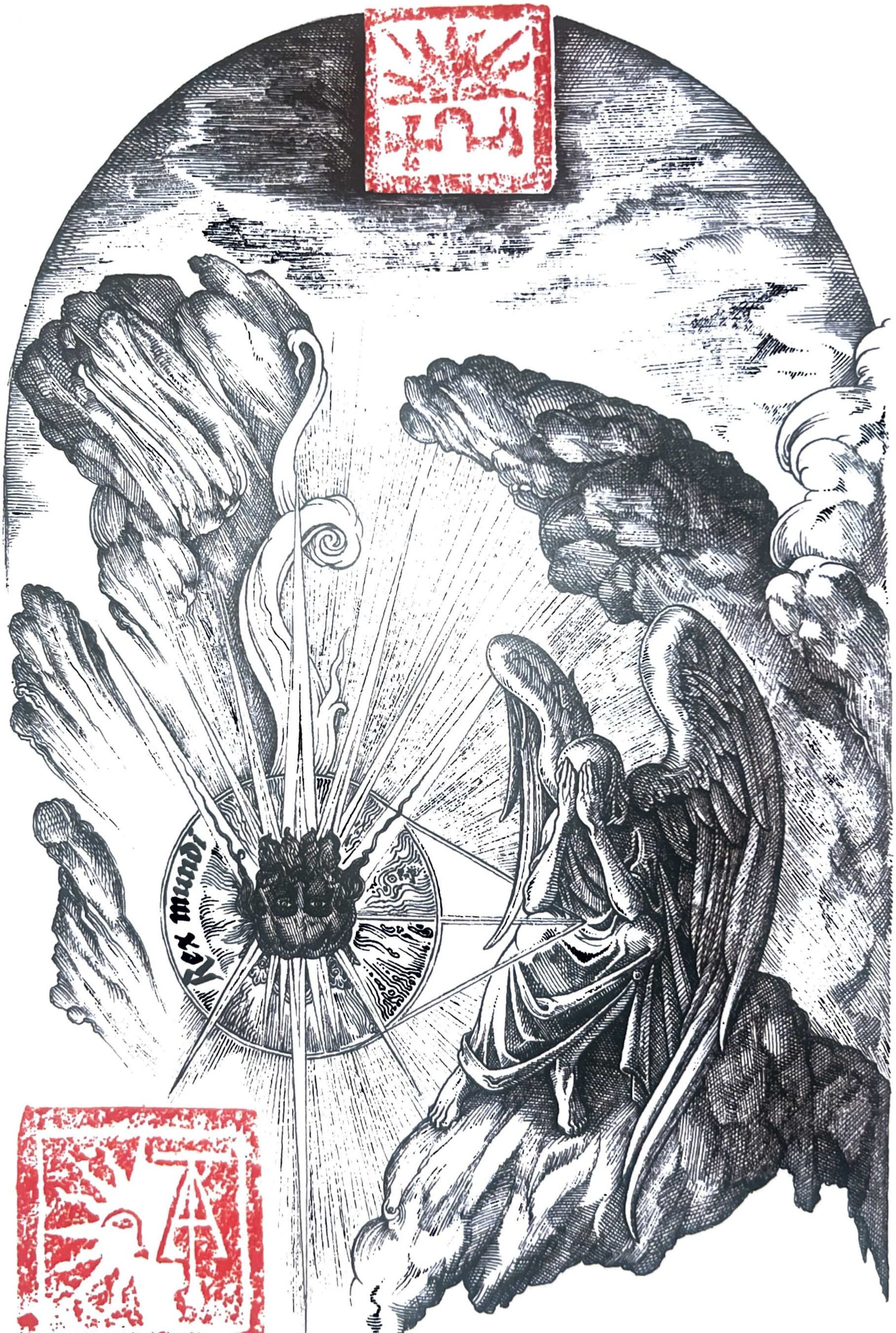
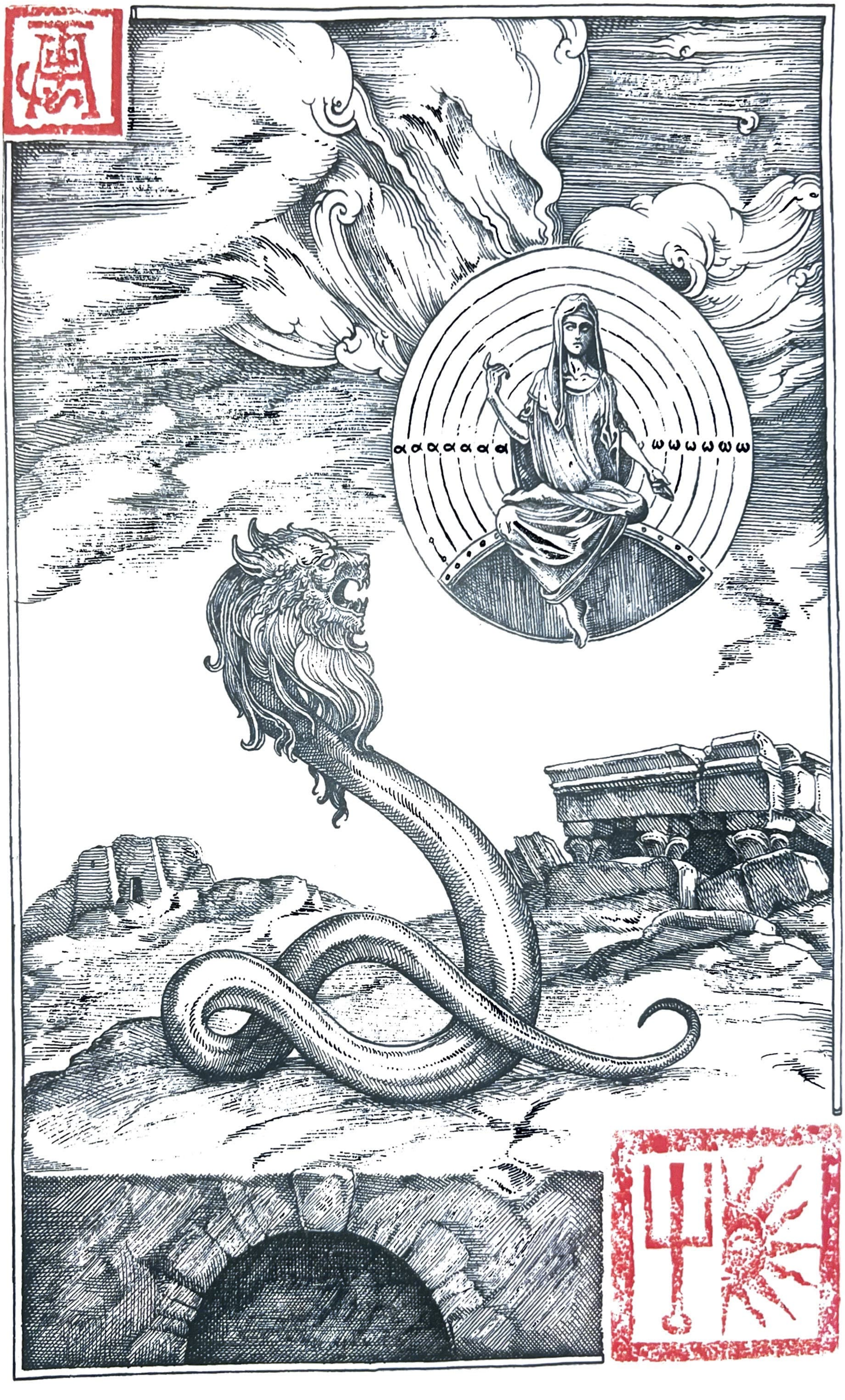
[5] Salustio, *Sobre los dioses y el mundo*, Introducción, traducción y notas de Enrique Ángel Ramos Jurado (Madrid: Gredos, 2008), p. 287.

[6] *Los Gnósticos*, Volumen I, introducción, traducción y notas de José Montserrat Torrens (Madrid: Gredos, 1983), p. 95, note 16.

[7] Irenaeus of Lyon, *Adversus Haereses*, I:3.


Rex mundi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The next scene we have chosen to depict is Sophia confronted with the Lion-faced power.[8] He is a form of Adamas, the tyrant, called by many names attributed to the demiurge, partly taken from his Hebrew epithets. He is hereby presented in his shape as *Ialdabaoth*, fully revealed in his monstrous nature – yet such a serpent is numinous and ambivalent. It does represent the god of deceit, and at the same time stands for awareness about his nature and can therefore fulfil the role of an apotropaic beast.

This scene precedes the gradual descent of Sophia into the nether regions and her repentances. Although she is depicted still in her glory, for glorifying her is the aim of this book, what follows in the myth is her utmost debasement, as she is devoured by the beast.

> "Thence she went forth from the twelve aeons, and came into the regions of chaos; she drew nigh to that lion-faced light-power to devour it. But all the material emanations of Arrogant surrounded her, and the great lion-faced light-power devoured all the light-powers which were in Sophia; it expelled her light and swallowed it, and as to her matter, they cast it into the chaos. So it became a lion-faced ruler in chaos, of which the one half is fire and the other darkness – that *Ialdabaoth* of which I have spoken to you many times."[9]

Our image of Sophia is slightly inspired by certain androgynous bodhisattvas and Indian goddesses, her foot pointing towards the earth symbolizing her potential to manifest in the world. A previous attempt to depict such a vision of divine knowledge is the image of *Ruha-Shekinah* published in *(h)Auroræ* where, inversely to this one, the spirit of knowledge stands victorious over matter, the *Clayborn Creatura*, the *weeping Prima Materia*.[10]

This confrontation scene, were Sophia shines like a vision in the sky, is also inspired in a passage in the *Kena* or *Talavakara Upanishad*, where the gods are unable to recognize the goddess, as well as the higher principle of *Brahman*. Just as *Ialdabaoth*, they mistakenly attribute all power and creation to themselves.

> "*Brahman* obtained the victory for the *Devas* (gods). The *Devas* became elated by the victory of *Brahman*, and they thought,

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[8] *Pistis Sophia: A Gnostic Gospel* (London: The Theosophical Publishing Society, 1896), p. 46.

[9] Ibid., pp. 46–47.

[10] McCaughry, Gabriel, *(h)Auroræ* (Quebec: Anathema Publishing, 2017), pp. 98–100.

> this victory is ours only, this greatness is ours only. *Brahman* perceived this and appeared to them. But they did not know it and said: What sprite (*yuksha* or *yaksha*) is this? Then in the same space (ether) he came towards a woman, highly adorned: it was *Uma*, the daughter of *Himavat*. He said to her: who is that sprite? She replied: It is *Brahman*, it is through the victory of *Brahman* that you have thus become great. After that he knew that it was *Brahman*."[11]

The goddess appears on the sky pointing towards a higher principle. The lion-headed serpent stands coiled on a deserted landscape with ruins. It is the state of the world which he has caused, inspired by the prophecy in the *Asclepius*, a time when Egypt will no longer be full of temples, but it will be full of tombs.[12]

We thus find that in late antiquity, a period that has often been labelled as decadent and syncretic, a strong rhetoric of decadence and decay has also been employed. This was probably propelled by the very teachers of such mysteries, as it might have reinforced their way of teaching, full of secrecy and of a semi-clandestine nature.

The lion-headed power devouring Sophia inevitably brings to mind how the dragon in the book of Revelation shall ultimately turn against the *Whore of Babylon* who rode him, and "shall make her desolate and naked, and shall eat her flesh, and burn her with fire." (Revelation 17:16)

Perhaps the two figures seen in John's revelation, the *Woman clothed as the Sun* and the *Whore of Babylon*, could be understood as two aspects of the same figure, just as the aforementioned *Mahavidyas*, who can be both peaceful and wrathful. Two manifestations of the same principle?

Some extreme Indian ascetics explain how the devotees can treat the goddess in many ways:

> Some treat Her as sister, some as friend, advisor or wife. A few regard Her as a sixteen-year-old daughter, and the Aghoris treat Her as a servant. But my teacher Vimalananda opined that it is best to treat Her as a mother. In her aspect of *Adya* she is Mother of all worlds and all beings.[13]

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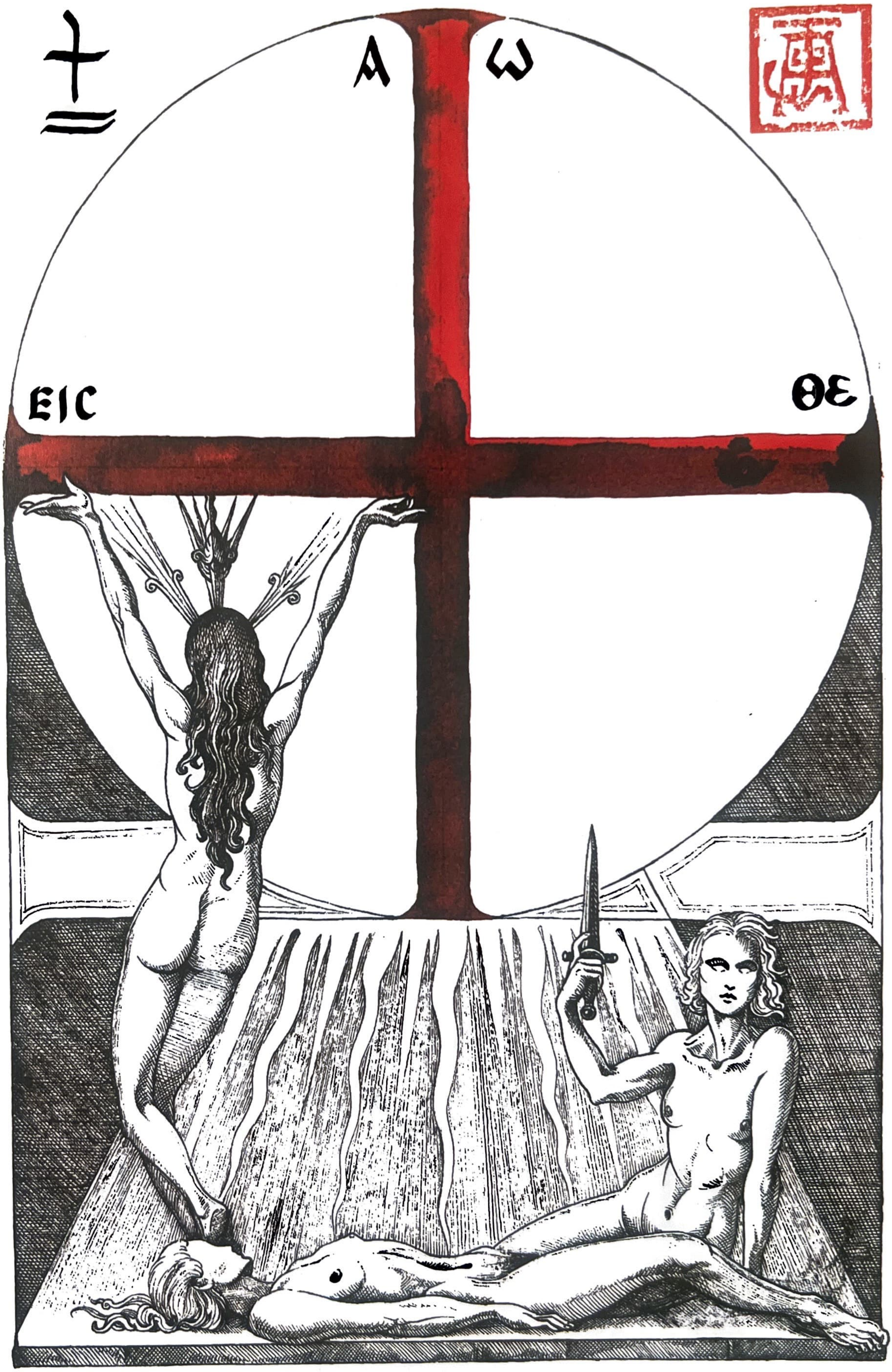
[11] Müller, Max, *The Sacred Books of the East, Volume I* (Varanasi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1988), pp. 149–151.

[12] *Textos Herméticos*, introducción, traducción y notas de Xavier Renau Nebot (Madrid: Gredos, 1999), p. 462.

[13] Svoboda, Robert E. *Aghora I: At the Left Hand of God* (New Delhi: Rupa, 2017), p. 15.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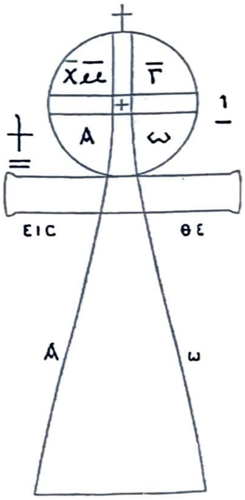
All of this speaks of a fascinating multifaceted nature, which is wonderfully expressed in that poem known as *The Thunder, Perfect Mind*, where Sophia declares to be *the whore and the holy one.*[14]

The goddess thus becomes the indispensable hierophany, without which the theophany of an unfathomable godhead would not at all be possible. She is both the origin of the world as well as its redeemer. It is in this way that negative theology and an array of endless and colourful manifestations can coexist within the same system. All angelology follows the same principle. Angels become necessary once it is stated that the highest principle is unthinkable – and none could be more precious than the angel of wisdom.

Finally, Irenaeus tells that the Father, sometimes *presented as the spouse of Silence, sometimes as surpassing the conditions of male and female,*[15] emanated a Limit in his own image – but without a female component – so that Sophia might be redeemed and reabsorbed into the fullness of the *Pleroma*; but the intention and passion that caused the fall were purged and left outside of it. Here we dare to intuit that like in Buddhism, it is desire that is taken as the cause of suffering and dissociation, and not what later Christianity would develop as the notion of sin. This *limit* was the cross, taken in an esoteric sense, which can be interpreted as the intersection between two worlds. For this, we have chosen to adopt the cross in the frontispiece of the *Codex Brucianus,*[16] interpreted by Lamplugh as the *Master Symbol of the Unitive State.*[17]

Our choosing of this diagram is also motivated by the fact that it cannot be visually confused with the physical or pretended historical crucifixion, which the Christ so bluntly denies in books as the apocryphal Acts of John.



The *Gnostic Cross* from the *Codex Brucianus.*

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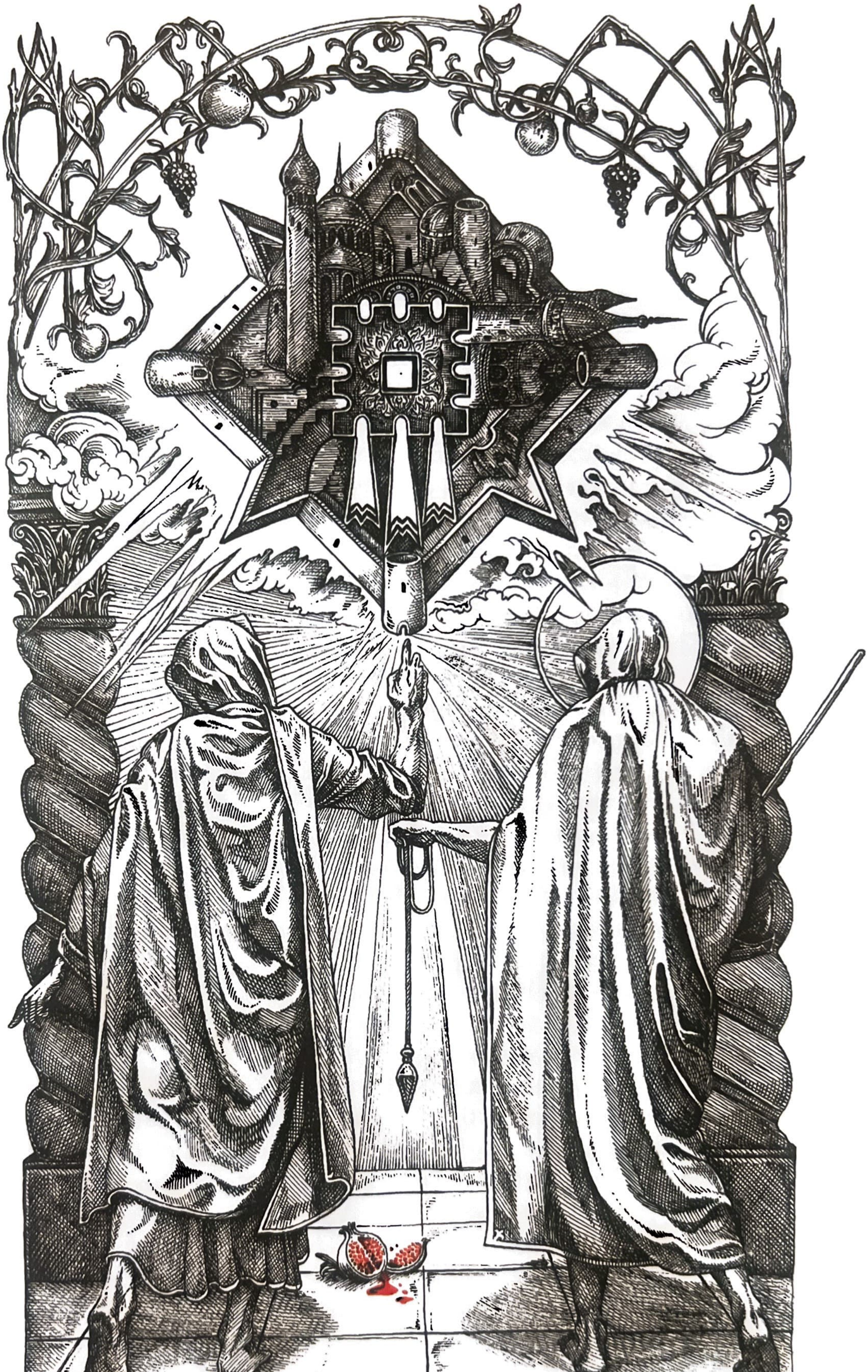
[14] *The Thunder, Perfect Mind*, translated by George W. MacRae, In Robinson, James M. (ed.), *The Nag Hammadi Library* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1990).

[15] Irenaeus of Lyon, *Adversus Haereses*, I:4.

[16] Lamplugh, B. A., Rev. F., *The Gnosis of the Light: A Translation of the Untitled Apocalypse in the Codex Brucianus with Introduction and Notes* (London: Watkins, 1918).

[17] Ibid., p. 85, Note 38.



Ap 21.15 Ez 40.3

Following this symbol of union, it is fitting to progress to the highest and most abstract vision of the godhead in female form, and that is the Holy City. After telling the myth of Sophia, we will progress from the most abstract to the most explicit form of imagining and representing her.

It is the heavenly Jerusalem, described in detail in the vision of Ezekiel (Ezekiel 40:3 onwards) and again in Revelation 21:15. In both books, it is the final vision and the pinnacle of their revelation. Here, Ezekiel enters the city accompanied by the great architect who held a plummet and a measuring stick. The temple is decorated with pomegranates, as Solomon was instructed to do, and they stand between the two pillars (2 Chronicles 3:16–17). The pillars are of the shape that would traditionally be called Solomonic, as such was the appearance of the relics believed to have belonged to the temple. Gothic and Baroque, the two great non-classical styles, developed two different visual interpretations based on the descriptions from Ezekiel and the temple of Solomon – two art forms that attempted to take the same text to reality, with greatly differing results.

The city itself, however, does not follow the same perspective as the rest of the scene. The twelve gates, three on each side, are seen all at once, because it is seen from outside of time and space. All depth that belongs to life and linear history has collapsed and the vision exists in an *eternal now*, where it cannot unfold further; in plenitude and fullness that is, as expressed in the *Isha Upanishad*, irreducible.

But why feminine? It is called the "bride of the lamb" in Revelation 21:9 and perhaps the work that best expresses this identification is the *Mistica ciudad de Dios* (*Mystical City of God*) by Sor María de Jesús de Agreda, from 1670, where the Virgin is directly and profusely identified with the heavenly Jerusalem in unsurpassed poetic symbolism. Thus, as seen before, she can be both the bride and the mother, and once again all aspects reveal themselves as parts of a fullness, that is capable of infinite manifestations.

Panofsky's remarks on perspective are a useful tool for appreciating the forms of perspective that would otherwise seem naïve to the modern spectator. Linear perspective is an element of the modern mind, and characteristic of it, just as the belief that it is a progress from a previous state of ignorance. *Aspective*, its contrary, is the expression of a spiritual view of the world and can be found in the art of all the ancient societies that perceived this world as enchanted.

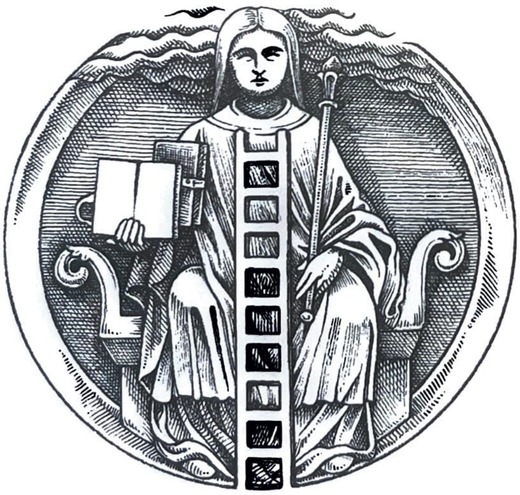
In medieval art it gradually disappeared, and yet it remained when it came to represent the heavenly Jerusalem, like the example in the manuscripts of the Beatus of Liebana (730–800 AD); or in rose windows, where it came to be associated with the Virgin Mary as a flower, or with Christ as the sun.

Therefore, we have chosen to use linear perspective, a language we nowadays understand when it comes to depicting the realm of man and duality – but we strongly believe that *aspective* should be kept when it comes to the depiction of fullness and the infinite, to employ a language that is coherent with a metaphysical view of reality. *Aspective* is still the language of ecstatic vision, and of dreams. It is simply the way in which the beholder experiences the Other, a reoccurring pattern throughout different cultures, traditions, and religions, employed to express union with the ultimate reality.

This symbolism could be discussed further as it appears for example in the writings of Teresa of Ávila in her *Interior Castle* (1577), which has interesting parallels in Sufism, or in the whole *Hekaloth* literature.

In this context, however, it is more accurate to include the example in the *Codex Brucianus*:

> "The firmament which surrounds her (The Monad) is like a tower with twelve gates, and at every gate are twelve myriads of powers; archangels are they called, or angels. This is the metropolis of the Alone-begotten Son."[18]



Jung interpreted these patterns as representative of the individuation process, yet in the present work we consider them to be more representative of the *Mysterium Tremendum* than of any human psychological reality. Jung himself drew wonderful mandalas that are recorded within his *Red Book*, and he is yet to be recognized as one of the most fascinating artists of the XX century. If these pertain to man and his dreams, that does not exclude that they have, more strongly throughout history, belonged to the realm of vision and the sacred.

Two iconographies appeared in the Middle Ages, that can be understood as images for Sophia. One is the allegory of Philosophy and the arts, interpreted by Fulcanelli as an allegory of Alchemy;[19] the other is the Russian icon of the Holy Wisdom that appeared in the XV century.

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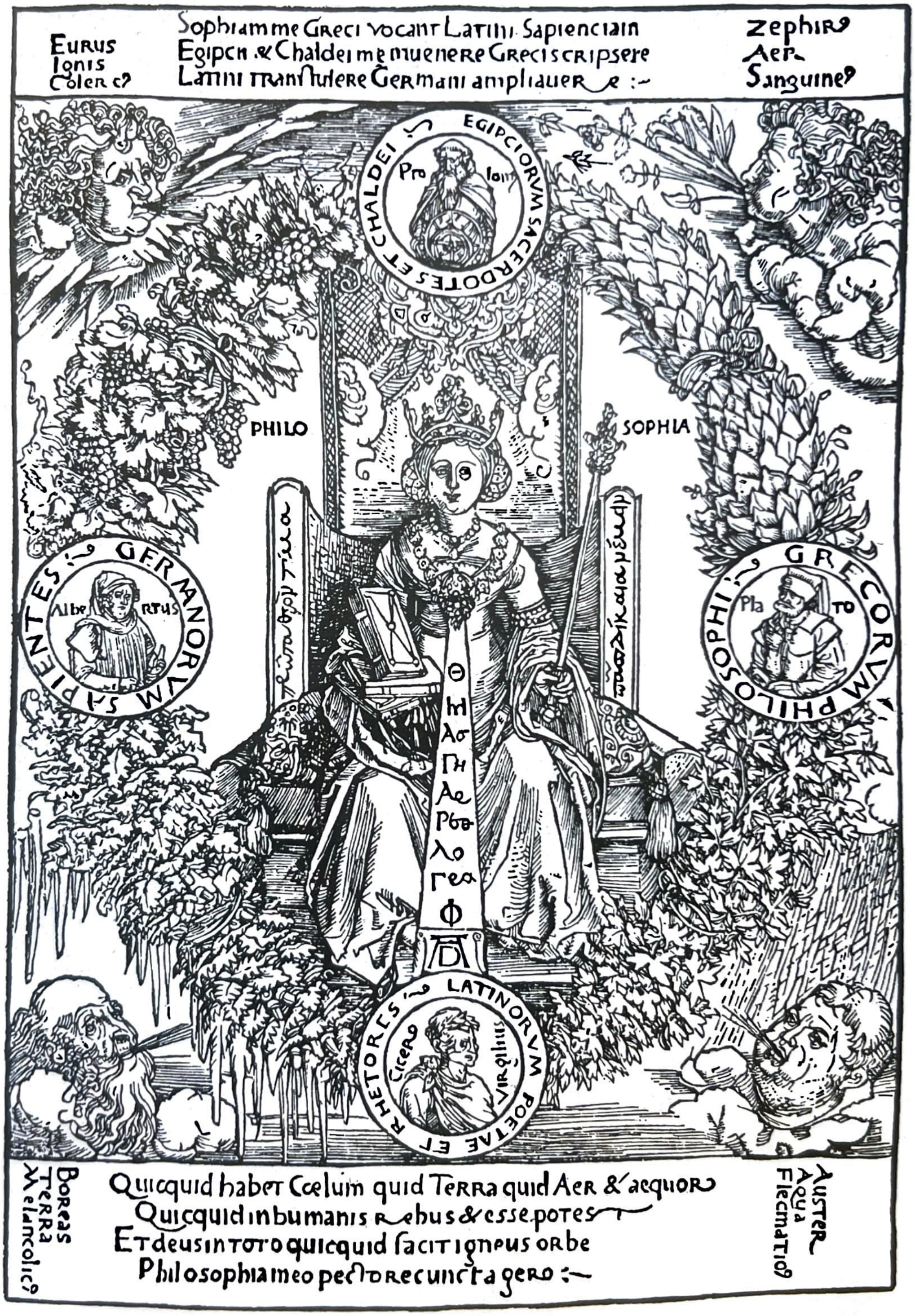
[18] Lamplugh, B. A., Rev. F., *The Gnosis of the Light: A Translation of the Untitled Apocalypse in the Codex Brucianus with Introduction and Notes* (London: Watkins, 1918), p. 32.


Eurus
Ignis
Colericus
Sophiam me Greci vocant Latini Sapienciam
Egipcii & Chaldei me invenere Greci scripsere
Latini transtulere Germani ampliavere :-
Zephirus
Aer
Sanguineus
EGIPCIORUM SACERDOTES ET CHALDEI
Pto
lomeus
PHILO
SOPHIA
GERMANORUM SAPIENTES
Albe
rtus
GRECORUM PHILOSOPHI
Pla
to
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Π
Φ
LATINORUM POETAE ET RHETORES
Cicero
Virgilius
Quicquid habet Coelum quid Terra quid Aer & aequor
Quicquid in humanis rebus & esse potest
Et deus in toto quicquid facit igneus orbe
Philosophia meo pectore cuncta gero :-
Boreas
Terra
Melancolicus
Auster
Aqua
Flecmaticus

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[19] Fulcaneli, *El Misterio de las Catedrales* (Barcelona: Plaza & Janes, 1971), p. 85.

The allegory of wisdom is notably carved in the central pillar of the eastern gate of Notre Dame in Paris. Enthroned, holding a sceptre in the left hand, her head is surrounded by clouds. In her lap and right hand, she holds two books, one is open, the other closed. Far from Fulcanelli's fantastic interpretations, the closed book is the only symbol that could be interpreted as representing esoteric knowledge.

Similar figures appeared in manuscripts during the Middle Ages; there is an engraving by Dürer in which the very figure is clearly depicted as the embodiment of philosophy and the liberal arts. The Greek letters on her chest stand for the initials of the seven liberal arts: Music, astronomy, geometry, arithmetic, rhetoric, logic (or dialectics) and grammatic. Plus, on the beginning and end of this list, two more letters stand for philosophy (at the bottom) and theology (at the top).

Philosophy, reproduced in: *The Complete Woodcuts of Albrecht Dürer*, Edited by Dr. Willi Kurth, With an Introduction by Campbell Dodgson, M.A., C.B.E. (New York: Dover, 1963), Plate 146.

Wisdom is shown surrounded by the Latin poets and rhetors, the wise men of Germany, the philosophers of Greece, and the priests of the Egyptians and Chaldeans. Surrounding all these are the four winds, the four humours and the four elements. It is possible that Dürer dispensed with the medieval ladder as it would distort any attempt of realistic proportions, yet he keeps the hierarchy of the arts.[20] Philosophy and theology, at the bottom and the top respectively, should not imply one being inferior to the other. As this image attempts to depict the wisdom of the whole ancient world, it speaks of the notion of a *Prisca Theologia*: for the ancients, in *illo tempore*, wisdom was one.

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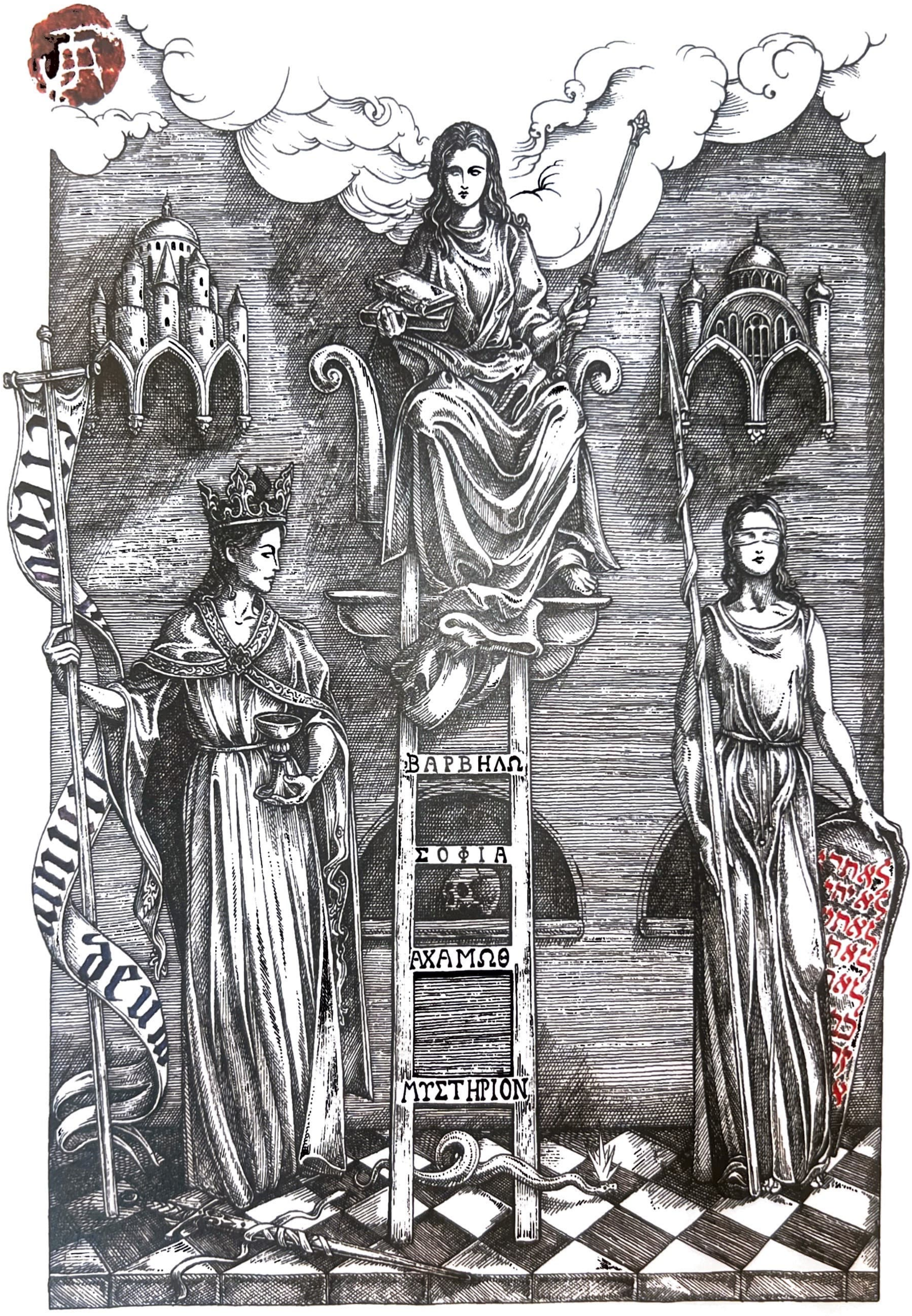
[20] An esoteric aspect and interpretation of the liberal arts is also given by Guénon, with regards to the symbolism in Dante and Masonry. See: Guénon, René *El Esoterismo de Dante* (Buenos Aires: Dédalo, 1976), pp. 18–21.

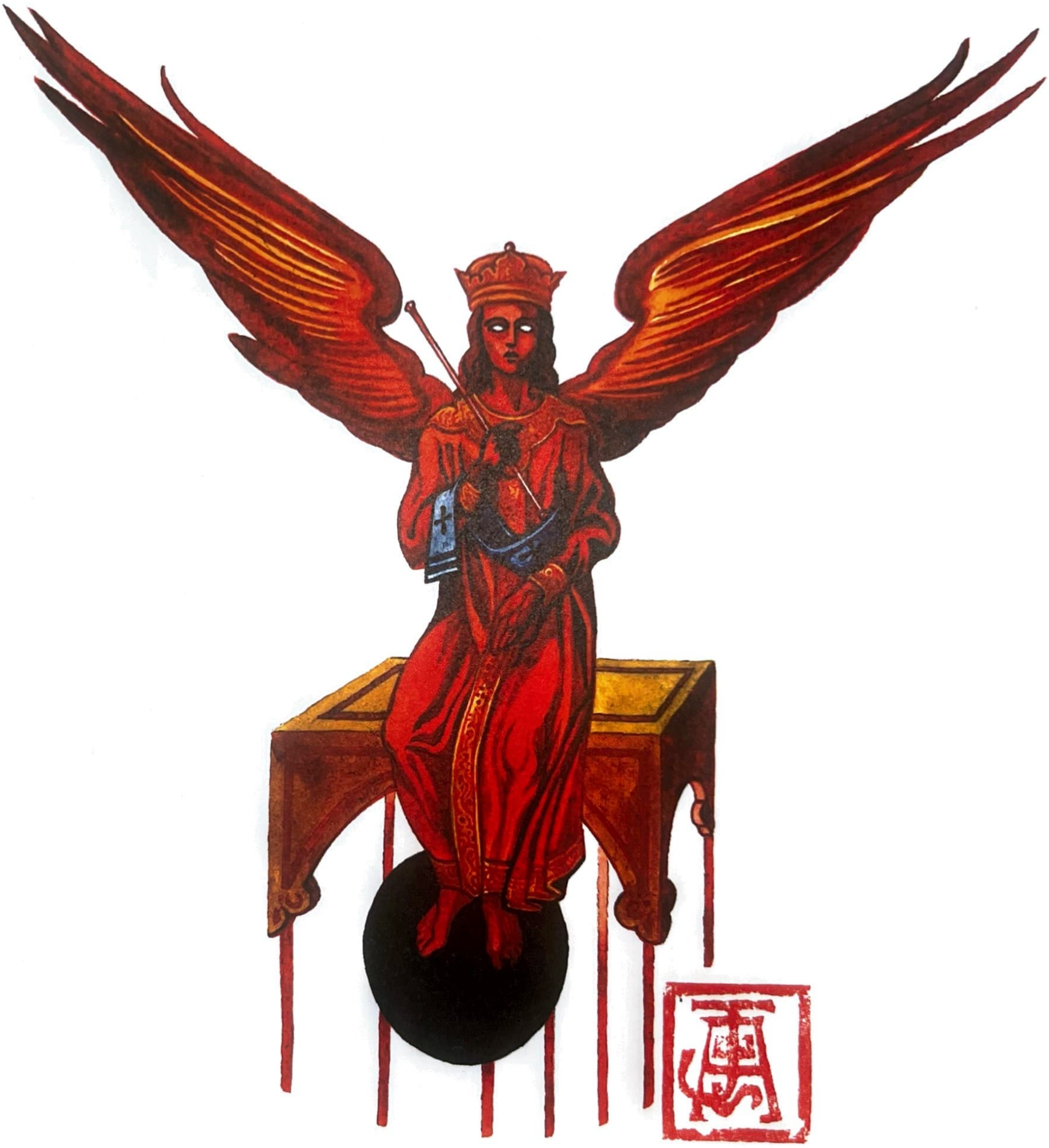
The Church, the Synagogue, and Sophia

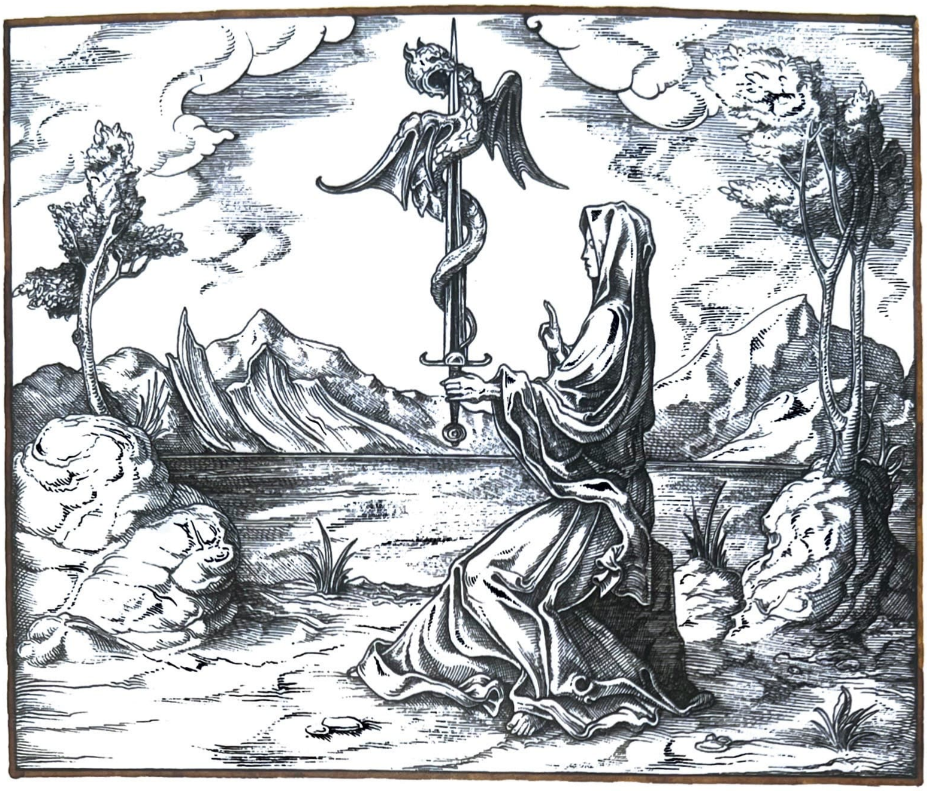
WE have based our following depiction of Sophia on the previous examples, yet both her books are closed. We have reconstructed her stairway, not with the liberal arts, but with the hierarchical levels of her manifestations, from bottom to top they read: *Mysterion, Achamot, Sophia, Barbelo.* As with everything in gnostic systems, these levels show variations from one account to the other. Therefore we have included the minimal quantity possible, *Barbelo* being the greater hermaphrodite principle, and *Achamot* her lowest manifestation as mother of the demiurge.

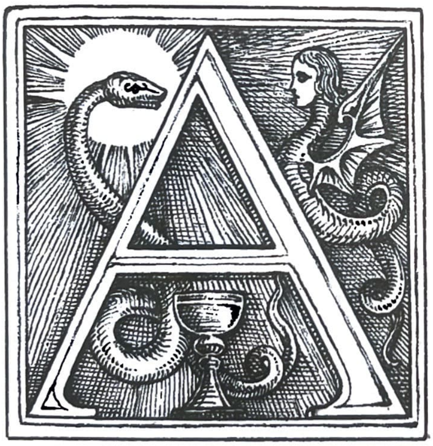
We have combined this image with another piece of medieval iconography that is also present on the eastern portal of Notre Dame. *The church and the synagogue* was a medieval artistic trope that bluntly stated the superiority of one over the other. The triumphant church looks in defiance, crowned, holding a chalice and a labarum; the synagogue is blindfolded, holding the tablets of the old law, and a spear or standard. However, her standard is usually depicted as broken, and here it is not. She continues to live on despite the abuses of her younger sister, the Church. But Sophia sits above the two, indifferent to their worldly battles - she is not, nor ever was, the exclusive possession of any creed. She has no building representing her, and the Church, despite not being blindfolded, is unable to see her.

With the icons of Holy Wisdom, which appeared during the XV century in Russian paintings, it is interesting to note that icons usually tend to avoid the allegorical genre. They are mysterious and of a complex interpretation, but just as the Gospels, they claim to be grounded in historical revelation. Their visual austerity emphasizes this point. Therefore, the case of the icons for the Holy Wisdom, which coincide with the fall of Byzantium, is a rare example in its way of discourse. Such an example can be found in the Moscow's Cathedral of the Annunciation. She is shown seated on top of seven thin pillars, as it follows the verse in the book of Proverbs 9:1. Clad and crowned in imperial Byzantine regalia, holding a pallium and a sceptre, this brilliant red angel could be, if merely by coincidence, taken as a perfectly fitting depiction of the gnostic Sophia.


Credo
unum
deum
ΒΑΡΒΗΛΩ
ΣΟΦΙΑ
ΑΧΑΜΩΘ
ΜΥΣΤΗΡΙΟΝ







A MYSTERY. The maiden with the sword. The sword with the serpent. This same enigma is present in the *Aurora Consurgens*. It is the embodiment of a contradiction: two opposed principles, tamed by her hand. It is the mystery of spirit in matter. This was at the heart of alchemy. Zosimos of Panopolis might have been the link between Gnosticism and Alchemy, in which case we could speak of an actual tradition to be found, as a spinal column, regarding the mysteries in the West. But it is too daring to assert such a thing – the mystery is still veiled, just as the maiden. The *Corpus Hermeticum* makes several contradictory statements, speaking about the evil of the world, and the divinity of man. Of both sacred sexuality and the evil of matter. It is important to remember that treatises from the *Corpus Hermeticum* were also found at Nag Hammadi. And some even speak of an early practice of Hermetic Alchemy. In the same manner, some Gnostics were extremely puritanical, whilst others rejected all moral law as belonging to a deceitful god. We believe that such an essential contradiction exists because they are two faces of a same coin; both are, at heart, incompatible with exoteric Christian society. The mystery is still veiled, and it is not in our capacity to explain it, but to glorify it. In the end, as Blake stated, *truth can never be told as to be understood, and not be believed.* (*Proverbs of Hell*, 69).

The patterns of initiation, similarly, consist of an exposition of sacred symbols, of that which *Is* with a capital "I," in contrast to the world of manifested phenomena. Thus, it cannot involve discursive language nor deductive reasoning - one does not come to an understanding as if solving an equation, and so there can be plenty of work in preparing for initiation, but revelation simply is or is not. Therefore, it is so frequently associated with lightning. Guénon also explains this when it comes to the study of Hindu doctrines, and yet this is very much the pattern that can be seen in the alchemical tradition, where the sequences of images do not seem to explain but to expose.

We have already mentioned a reference to the *Virgo Astrea* from Ovid, taken to represent Sophia as a female angel. This was closely related to the vision in Revelation[21] 12:1: a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars.

However, we have taken several turns from the traditional description of this vision, as it inspired the iconography for the Immaculate Conception. Its identification with the Virgin Mary is not explicit in the text, and so, in a similar manner to the Church Fathers, our exegesis makes associations that are not evident, but point in different directions.

She is black. As in the Song of Songs 1:5: *I am black, but comely, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, as the tents of Kedar, as the curtains of Solomon.*

She is Isis as the *Kore Kosmou*, as "the Pupil of the Eye of the World." Fittingly enough, Monier-Williams translates the Sanskrit word "Krishna," among several definitions, as "the black part of the eye,"[22] and comments on how this colour is often confused or interchangeable with a sort of dark blue or indigo. This is the mysterious hue with which several gods are still depicted, as the night sky, and it might point towards the fact that they are unmanifested, and not part

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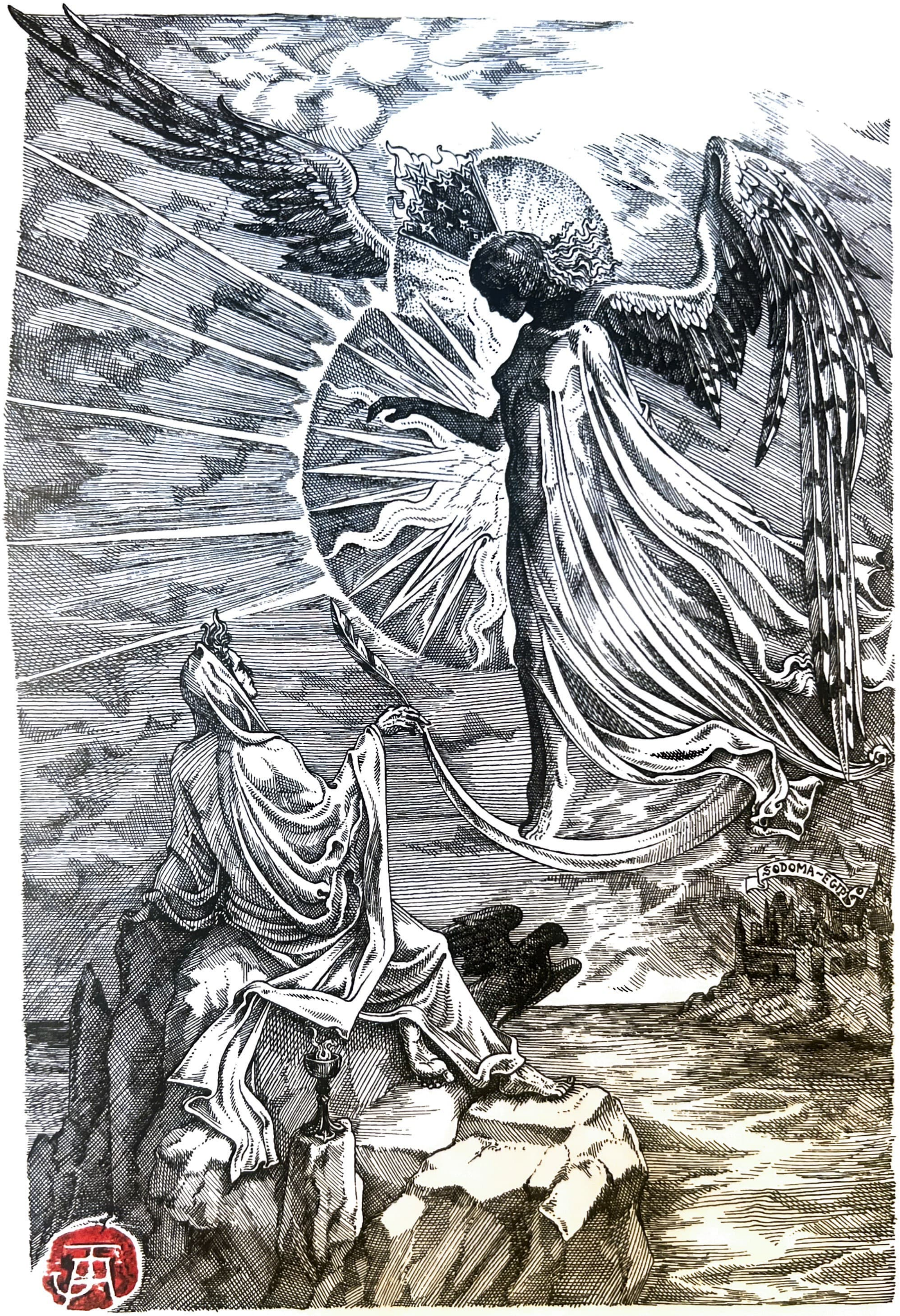
[21] For this parallel, see: Mujica, Ramón, *Rosa Limensis: Mística, política e iconografía en torno a la patrona de América*, (Lima: IFEA, 2001). Chapter 4: Rosa o la virgen Astrea: el fundamento místico de una sacra política indiana.

[22] Monier-Williams, Monier *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, (London: Clarendon, 1872).


SODOMA-EGITO

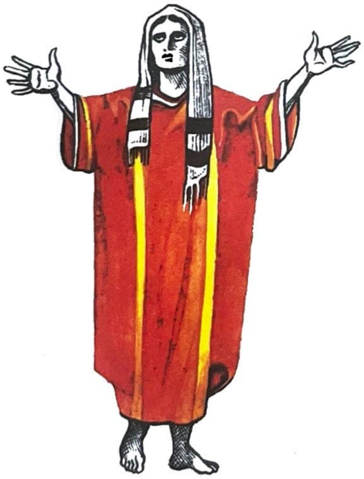
of this creation.[23] An aspect so strongly emphasized by the Gnostics about their own concept of God.

Apollonius of Tyana was said to have come across a woman that was black from head to chest, and white from chest to feet, which caused terror among his travel companions, but he took her by the hand and interpreted her as an auspicious being, that was to be consecrated to Aphrodite, and to Apis among the Egyptians.[24]

John the Evangelist in the island of Patmos is usually depicted as beholding the woman clothed with the sun. Here, he dips his quill in the crescent moon. The Gnostic aspects of his gospel are already well known.

But the woman is neither pregnant nor holding a child. Her importance does not rest in such a fruit; as the Son is also considered to be Self-Begotten, it is fitting to represent the goddess by herself.

The Agape of the *Borborites*



EPIPHANIUS' *Panarion* is probably the most defamatory document about the Gnostics that has come down to us. Their liturgy, involving foetuses, semen, or menstrual blood has most likely influenced the fervid imagination of Christians, when it comes to imagining anti-Christian rituals. We say 'anti-Christian' because certainly such an imagination could only perceive other religions as a distortion or inversion of their own. We are not particularly interested in the graphic details of this model for the Witches' Sabbath, instead, it is interesting to highlight that the *Borborites*, whatever their real name might have been, placed a very important role on the female aspects of the divine, so much so as to include a lost *Gospel of Eve* among their sacred texts. The importance of Eve as an almost messianic figure is also key for the system of the Ophites.

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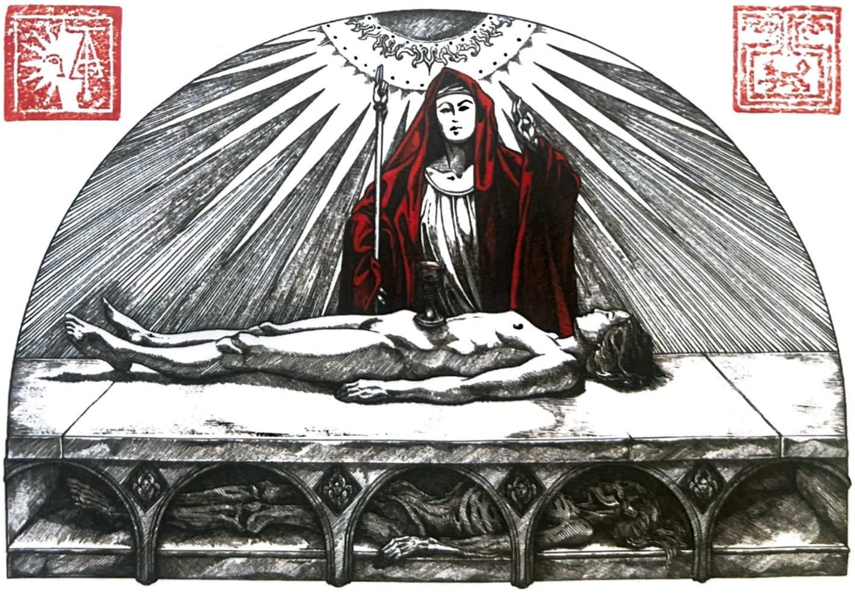
[23] See Bhagavad-Gita 9:5

[24] Filóstrato, *Vida de Apolonio de Tiana, Traducción, introducción y notas de Alberto Bernabé Pajares,* (Madrid: Gredos, 1992) pp.174–175.

Here we include many of these rumours in an attempt to boil them down, so to speak, into a dignified image. Consider one such idea, that some sects held female priestesses. Our priestess blesses with the left hand, and is clothed with the *flammeum*, the nuptial veil, inspired in a figure from the Catacombs of Saint Priscila in Rome. This "cubiculum of the veiled woman" has been interpreted as depicting three stages of the life of the woman that was buried there.[25] This scene would be the glorification and beatitude of her soul.[26] Thus, in our image, she blesses her own sepulchre; her own flesh, doomed to decay, serves as the altar, for its transient nature does not hinder its sacredness. Such was the belief attributed by Clement of Alexandria to some Gnostics he called the *Antitaxas*, the belief that god created all things good.[27] Her nuptial act is the *Hieros gamos* with her own deity. Such intense "libertine Gnostic" interpretations would reappear in later heretical currents such as the Adamites, and is wonderfully expressed in Blake's verses:

The pride of the peacock is the glory of God.
The lust of the goat is the bounty of God.
The wrath of the lion is the wisdom of God.
The nakedness of woman is the work of God.

(PROVERBS OF HELL, 22–25)



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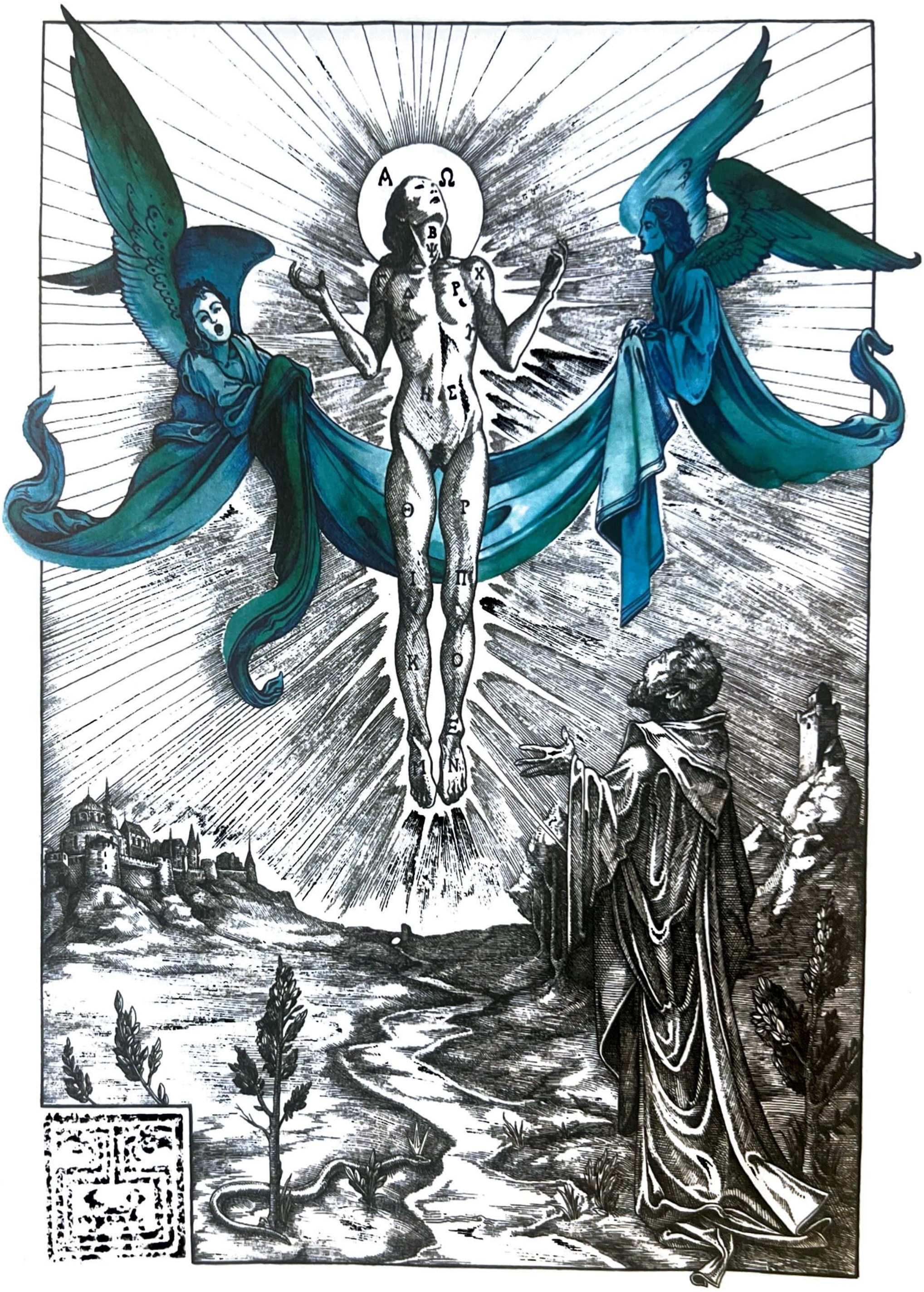
[25] Carletti, Sandro et Al., *Guía de la Catacumba de Santa Priscila* (Ciudad del Vaticano: Pontificia Comisión de Arqueología Sacra, 1985), p. 17.

[26] Ibid., pp. 18–19.

[27] Clemente de Alejandría, *Stromata*, III: 4 in: *Los Gnósticos*, Volumen II, introducción, traducción y notas de José Montserrat Torrens (Madrid: Gredos, 1991), p. 392.

Both the corpse and the female body are a purposeful inversion of the Old Testament's idea of purity, for is it not said that: *And I find more bitter than death the woman* (Ecclesiastes 7:26)

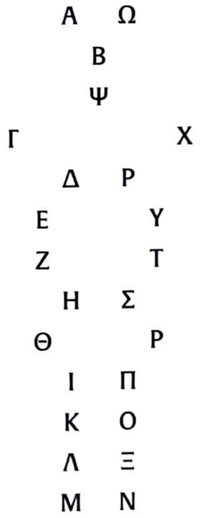


The Vision of Marcus the Magus

THE sequence started with the veiled goddess, and ends with the naked goddess, the highest vision. It is inspired by the *Venus Anadyomene* and the depictions of Mary Magdalene in books of Hours, the nakedness of the latter being usually covered with her own hair.

Marcus the Magus is openly described as a seducer of women and a charlatan by Irenaeus of Lyon.[28] This heresiarch and his disciples claimed to be superior to both the apostles Peter and Paul, and to be "ungraspable and invisible to the judge" thanks to the power of their mystical redemption, which consisted in a particular invocation preserved between them.[29] He taught that a sublime Tetrad had descended towards him from the invisible and unnameable places in the form of a woman, because the world could not withstand its masculinity.[30] Irenaeus then records a fascinating description of Marcus' *Revelation of Truth*, that identifies each letter of the Greek alphabet with a part of the female body of the truth, in the way in which we have tried to depict as accurately as possible.

> "After having declared these things, the Tetrad added: I will shew unto thee Truth, whom I have brought down from the celestial mansions that thou shouldest behold her naked, acknowledge her beauty, hear her speaking, and be astonished at her wisdom. Look up therefore at her head Alpha and Ω, at her neck B and Ψ, at her shoulders with her hands Γ and X, at her breasts Δ and P, at her chest E and Y, at her back Z and T, at her belly H and Σ, at her thighs Θ and P, at her knees I and Π, at her legs K and O, at her ankles Λ and Ξ at her feet M and N. This is the body of Truth, this the form of the letters, this the character of the writing. Whereupon Truth looked upon me (Marcus) and opened her mouth, and littered a word, and that word became a Name, a name which we know and speak – Christ Jesus: and having named him she held her peace."[31]



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[28] *Los Gnósticos*, Volumen I, introducción, traducción y notas de José Montserrat Torrens (Madrid: Gredos, 1983), p. 161.

[29] Ibid., pp. 164–165.

[30] Ibid., p. 166.

[31] The English translation of this passage by Irenaeus is taken from: King, C. W. *The Gnostics and their Remains: Ancient and Mediaeval* (London: David Nutt, 1887), pp. 287–288.

But "the restoration of all things will take place when the All had come to one letter only, and it will sound with one and identical pronunciation."[32] This is an idea that strongly reminds us of the *Bija* or "seed syllables" in both tantric Hinduism and Buddhism. Such a notion is also present in the *Gospel of Truth* and the *Voces Magicae* present in the magic of late antiquity, that are profusely carved into Gnostic gemstones.

Simon the Magus was also described by Irenaeus as having a sacralised relationship with the former prostitute Helen of Tyre, whom his disciples venerated as "*Ennoia*" ("first thought" of God). Both him and his consort were deified, and her narrative was strikingly similar to that of the Sophia Myth; she was proclaimed as an incarnation of Helen of Troy and as the "lost sheep" from Matthew 18:12–14. This is the very same Simon of Samaria described in the Acts of the Apostles 8:9-11, and is described, or rather cursed, by Irenaeus as being nothing less than the man from whom "all heresies derived."[33]

HERMENEUTICAL PROBLEMS

After an exposition of the most explicit aspects of such a figure, it is important to address the problem of its interpretation - or most accurately, to address some common mistakes.

The theory of the *Anima* can be summarized as the female counterpart to the male ego.

> If you are boys, your God is a woman.
> If you are women, your God is a boy.
> If you are men, your God is a maiden.
> The God is where you are not[34]

Yet the priests of Cybele were said to castrate themselves, the goddess who in Roman times would be worshiped as *Magna Mater*. Such men became women symbolically to better venerate the Goddess. Some men are said to perform the same in reverence for Krishna, renouncing their manhood in recognition of their deity as the only perfect man, and so they identify with her consort, Radha. Both Rumi and

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[32] *Los Gnósticos*, Volumen I, introducción, traducción y notas de José Montserrat Torrens (Madrid: Gredos, 1983), p. 167.

[33] Ibid., p. 200.

[34] Jung, C. G. *The Red Book*, Edited by Sonu Shamdasani (New York: Norton, 2009), Liber Primus, p. 234.

Saint John of the Cross undergo a fascinating feminization of their soul as they take the role of the spouse and speak of the deity as the beloved one. Sometimes it does work in direct opposition, but in other cases what can be witnessed is, in fact, the self-identification with the deity, as becoming one and the same with the *Ishtadevata* – even if it goes against preconceived notions of gender. A man can become the goddess, so to speak. Otto described the complex nature of this self-identification as "not equality, but identity."[35] Man is not freely equal to the godhead; he must discover this and transform himself, an aspect which we shall develop further regarding the *Gospel of Thomas*.

Jung's idea would neither explain the strong female following that the figure of the Virgin Mary has enjoyed, or the Goddesses in India for that matter. Perhaps one of the most detailed accounts of the cult to the goddess in antiquity can be found in the initiation undergone by Apuleius at the end of his *Metamorphosis*.

Thus, we cannot infer from the symbolic narrative of Sophia, the ritual and practical impact it had on the lives of Gnostic devotees.

Sexual symbolism depicting intercourse is present in Gnostic and Hermetic texts, and survives wonderfully in alchemy, either by inheritance or coincidence. Yet in Buddhist Tantra, sexually explicit images are used in meditation by communities of celibate men.

The axiom used to define and exclude any "other" as idolatrous is to consider them incapable of all abstraction; any bit of their symbolic discourse is taken out of context and exaggerated for the sake of mockery. Such could be the case with the portrait of the *Borborites* in Epifanius' *Panarion*. Understanding the Catholic Eucharist as a cannibal feast would be just as accurate, and we do not know if the accounts by the Church Fathers were, in fact, a caricature of such nature.

We simply cannot deduce the practical and ritualistic implications that a symbolic narrative had, based on its text. Even more so when it comes to what Verardi called an *antinomistic society*,[36] that considers the moral codes of its previous or surrounding context as part of the problem.

However, there are hints in the New Testament which seem to imply female presence in early Christianity as deaconesses (Romans 16:1) and prophetesses (Acts 21:9). Excerpts as the one in Galatians 3:28: *There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there*

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[35] "Nicht Gleichheit, sondern Identität," in Otto, Rudolf, *West-Östliche Mystik: Vergleich und Unterscheidung sur Wesendeutung* (Gotha: Leopold Klotz, 1926), p. 18.

[36] Verardi, Givanni (1997), "The Buddhists, the Gnostics and the Antinomistic Society, or the Arabian Sea in the First Century AD," *AION*, 57 (3/4): 324–346.

male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus, seem to abolish distinctions of both caste and gender. It also appears to tell us that the Gnosis of the saviour is the same as absolute liberation – both literal and symbolical.

We do see strong antinomian tendencies which imply that the Gnostics did not care as much about the Commandments and the contents of religion as social law, yet it is not possible to tell in which degree. This is, nevertheless, the pattern that allows the figure of the "divine madman" to arise in some religions.

The simple fact is that the current work does not care at all about the practical and moral applications of a hypothetical "Gnostic Religion," or any other religion. It aims to be only an echo that might at best magnify the voices of their visionary experiences and the metaphysical realities they spoke about.

In the light of these ideas, we dare to consider that the female aspects of the divine in Gnosticism do not tell us about a male-dominated form of mysticism. Considering it only as such would be impoverishing. Neither should it be understood as empowering the female simply by the fact of including it as an image of the divine. The female aspect of God is the necessary counterpart for the holy Hermaphrodite which seems to have been the highest conception of the godhead for the Gnostics. It is the aspect that can be known, which embodies knowledge and leads, not towards the Father, but towards the great being that is both sexless and possessing all sexes.

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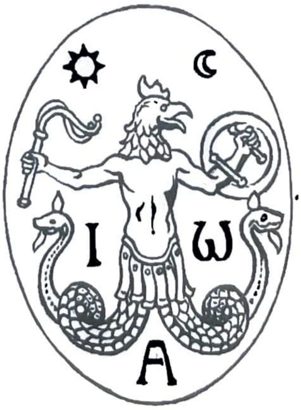
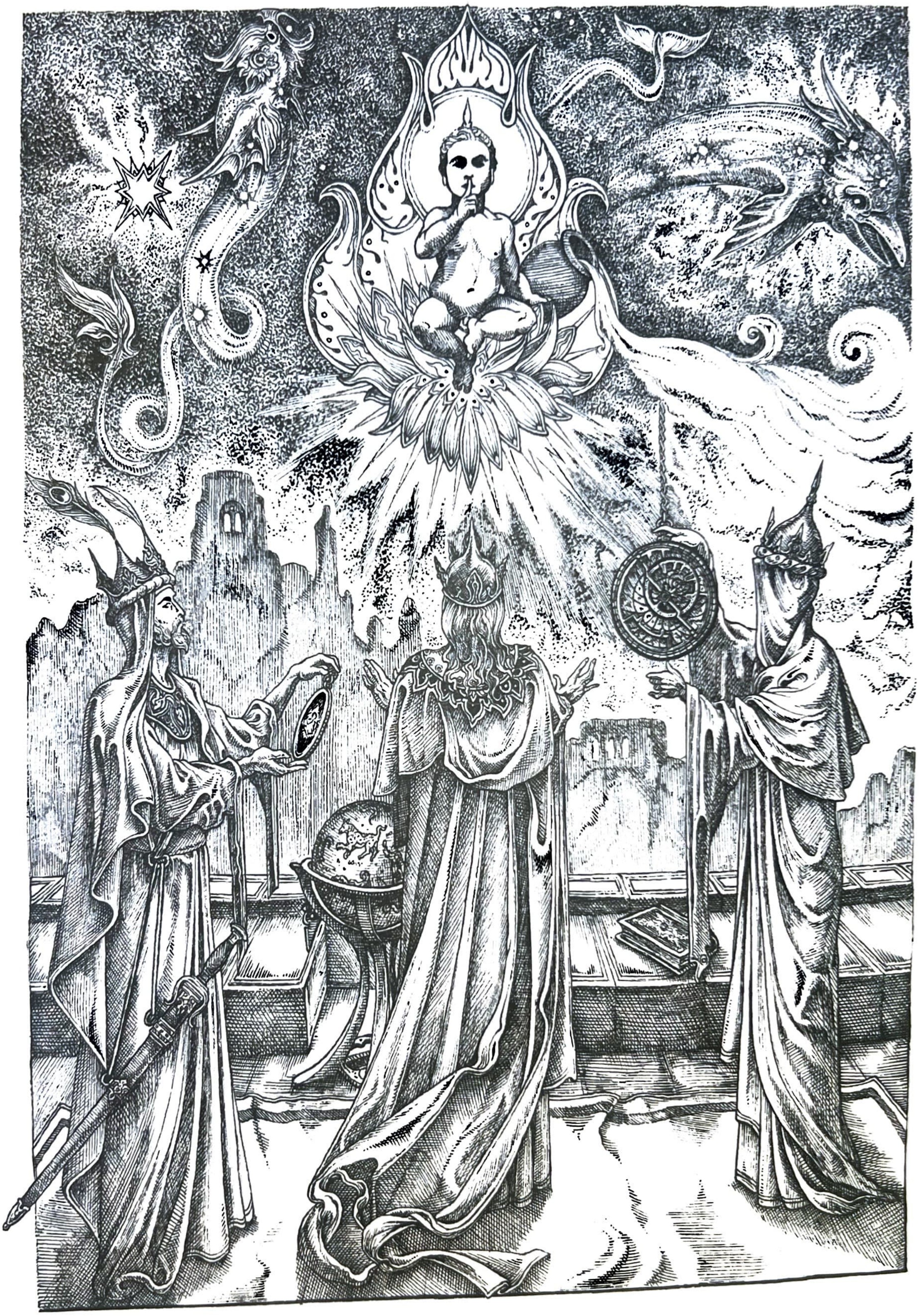
III

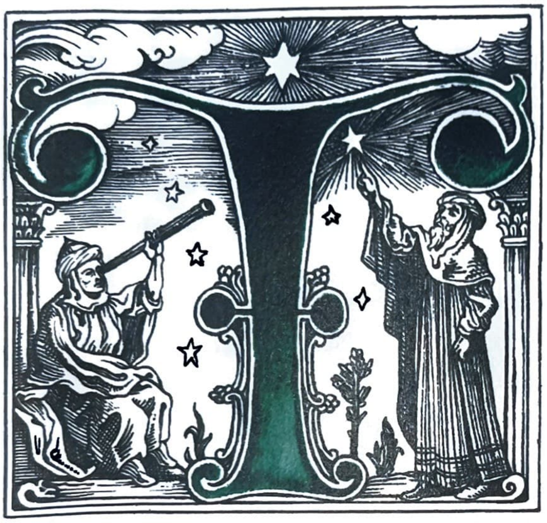
THE IMAGE OF THE PLEROMA

ON
DIVINE FULLNESS
AND THE
SERPENT CHRIST





HARPOCRATES AND THE WISE



THE WISE men of the ancient world saw the truth in the stars.

Such wise men were crystallized in the mysterious episode of the three Magi that appear at the Epiphany. This is again based on an iconography from the *Speculum Humanae Salvationis*, where the three Magi behold not only the auspicious star of Bethlehem, but the divine child within it, as a hierophany on the night sky.

There is a curious hint in the fact that these king-priests from the East might have been Zoroastrian. It seems to already imply the intuition that monotheism had started with Zoroastrianism, an idea which seems to be fundamentally correct.[1] The symbol of the Magi as the wise forebearers of Christianity inspired, through works as interesting and yet as dubious as the *Chaldean Oracles*, the Renaissance notion that Magic could not only be acceptable as a form of wisdom, but in fact part of the *Prisca Theologia*, the ancient primordial wisdom that was not at all refuted, but confirmed, by the coming of the Messiah. Such a "theology of magic," so to speak, flourished in the works of Pico della Mirandola.

[1] *But the drama of Zarathustra is likewise in a way the drama of Moses, of Mahomet, and of Jesus, or if you like of Paul. (...) The affirmation of monotheism always is expressed by the negation of polytheism, and this negation is never anything but the verbal symbol of a combat in which no quarter is given, the combat between a faith in its death-agonies and a new religious consciousness affirming itself.* From: "The formation of Monotheism" in Pettazzoni, Raffaele *Essays on the History of Religions* (Leiden: Brill, 1954), p. 8.

Perhaps ancient Christians searched in the distant Persian sages for a figure that might legitimize their doctrine, as it seemed new, and therefore devoid of authority in the eyes of their Jewish and Roman neighbours.

However, Christianity represented an important soteriological turn: it was the fact that men were no longer slaves of the stars, of their destinies, like Oedipus – they could instead achieve salvation through a conscious choice, through conversion and baptism. Gnosticism, considering itself the true Christianity, actively rejected astrological fatalism, and we have already discussed how in the *Corpus Hermeticum* there is even the belief that the signs of the zodiac influenced rebirth in the lower realms of animals.

Thus, astrology is a polemic topic, as it was believed to have real influence in the lives of men, but this was something that the initiate should aspire to escape from. As such, it has a similar problematic as the doctrine of *Karma*: its acceptance might lead to a passive attitude towards injustice as destiny, its celebration might become a frivolous cult of empty superstition – the sort of decadent "paganism" which the Church Fathers frowned upon.

The divine child in our emblem, however, is not Jesus, but Harpocrates. As such, he is lotus born, and exhorts the wise men to keep silent, holding the revelation in their hearts alone – as Borges would say, a *secret miracle*. The pot of Amrita overflows, giving birth to the milky way. Krishna as a child would also be shown stealing butter, the preferred food of the Vedic gods. He stands between the sign of Pisces, employed by the ancient Christians as a symbol for their saviour, and the subject of plenty later astrological interpretation. However, this symbol may also remind us of *Matsya* who, by saving Manu, symbolizes the beginning of a new cosmic cycle.

The depiction of the King-astrologers is in itself a wink, not devoid of humour, to the way in which they were depicted in Christian iconography, as an anachronistic representation of the East, which was both a recognition and an unwilling mockery of the unparalleled wisdom of astrology that the Islamic sages achieved during the Middle Ages. The Virgin was also depicted in this way, as a vision in the sky perceived by ancient astrologers.[2] A similar narrative was already present in the medieval legend of the *Aracoeli*, which tells that the Tiburtine Sibyl, at the time of Christ's birth, showed the emperor

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[2] See the emblem "Mater Purissima" by the Klauber brothers in Dornn, Francisco Xaviero *Litaniae Lauretanae*, (Augsbrug: Matthäus Rieger, 1771).

Augustus a vision of the Virgin and Child appearing in the sky surrounded by a golden radiance.[3]

But the child is self-born (*Svayambhu Brahma*) and as such he does not need the goddess to exist eternally. He is the golden germ, and seeking for him the wise men ask, "What God shall we adore with our oblation" *Cui deo?* (*Hiranyagarbha*, see Rig Veda X.CXXI, 1). The very same golden egg that is the fullness of the Pleroma, the origin of *Phanes*. He might be the cause, but not the creator, therefore he remains as a child, as eternal potential. He remains in silence, and therefore calls for silence. The wise men of the ancient world understood this principle.

THE Pleroma is fullness without contradiction, it is where all begins and where all shall end. All time and phenomena are just circular movements within it. We have chosen to depict this process in the following stages.

I. PLEROMA.	
II. Digression.	*The yolk and the egg white are formed inside it. They coexist but have already started their differentiation. Based on Heraclitus, alchemists believed that within an egg, all elements coexisted in harmony, hence they could bring forth life. And the yolk represented fire. Matter is represented by the black, and spirit by the gilding. This does not imply that matter is inferior; it is just in a state of undifferentiated* Prima Materia, *but the* Nigredo *is a precious thing in the eyes of the wise, the indispensable compost from which everything is derived. Although matter and spirit are shown in equal proportions, it is important to note that for several religions the metaphysical reality was often not only*

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[3] This legend was depicted twice by the Limbourg brothers in the XV century, as a wonderful hierophany on the nocturnal sky. Funnily enough, their depiction of the Emperor Augustus strongly resembles their own of the oldest of the three Magi in the *Tres Riches Heures*. See: Beatson, Elizabeth H. and Meiss, Millard, *The Belles Heures of Jean, Duke of Berry* (New York: George Braziller, 1974), fol. 26v. and: Cazelles, Raymond et Al. *The Tres Riches Heures of Jean, Duke of Berry* (New York: George Braziller, 1969), fol. 22r.

	equal to the extent of the material world, but much larger. Thus, we find that the realms of the aeons are almost infinite, just as a countless pure lands *are above this transitory world in the cosmogony of Mahayana Buddhism.*
III. Phanes.	*The first-born, or born of an egg, as described in the* Orphic Hymns;[4] *he is also identified as* Eros, *being the first creature born from primordial chaos. Such a* Pantheos, *an amalgamation seeking a transcendental form behind a multiplicity of gods, was characteristic of late antiquity, and found expressions in the* Egyptian *god* Bes, *and the Gnostic* Abrasax. *It represents the origin of all gods, as in the case of* Purusha, *but in later literature it also represents their ultimate unity, like the* Virat Rupa *of* Vishnu. *This conception took several forms, and not all of them were meant to be benign. The* Aion-Chronos *became also related to Mithraic depictions of* Ahriman, *and so, this marvellous primordial creature could also be perceived as monstrous.*[5]
IV. The Descent of the Serpent.	*The primordial revelation. The instant* in illo tempore *which both myth and ritual seek to emulate. The snake descends, crooking like lightning from the sky. The divine realm starts to recede and shrink away from man. At the* Axis Mundi *stands the Tree of* Knowledge, *and from it emanate the four rivers that spread from the* Garden *of Eden. The holy bird, the* Simurgh, *flies away.* One *feather from its tail falls, representing the* Vesica Pisces, *the intersection between*

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[4] *Vida de Pitágoras, Argonáuticas Órficas, Himnos Órficos*, Introducción, traducción y notas de Miguel Periago Lorente (Madrid: Gredos, 2014). Himno VI, pp. 171–172.

[5] See the chapters "Aion-(Kronos) Chronos in Egypt" and "The monstrous figure of Time in Mithraism" in: Pettazzoni, Raffaele *Essays on the History of Religions*. Leiden: Brill, 1954.

both worlds.[6] *The myth of the sacred feather that once fell is told in the* Conference of the Birds, *and it reminds us of the tale of Lucifer's fall as told by Eschenbach, where an emerald fallen from his crown becomes the* Graal. *"Unique am I from among the birds, like Gabriel,"*[7] *says the peacock in the* Conference, *praising himself for his own beauty – but is he not implying that the angel Gabriel is a bird as well? The bird and the snake coexist in several myths, and it is important to note that the* Pantheos Abrasax *is composed of both creatures.*

V. Polarization.

Matter and the divine become progressively alienated. The light of the divine sphere, now distant, does not shine on the material world any longer. It is simply a fact that religions tend to conceive history in degenerative terms. As the divine principles become more and more distant in time, there is always a fear of decay and the feeling of living in a "crepuscular age" takes hold. This happens when man is not able to regenerate time cyclically; history becomes a burden and enters a state of putrefaction. It also happens, as Eliade magnificently explained, that sky-gods tend to become more and more distant. This is, perhaps, the price to be paid when they become higher and more abstract concepts, contrary to the superstitions of old. This is a disease particular to Monotheism – or at least it suffers from this acutely. But this apocalyptic discourse is only that, and every time a god dies it is time for a new form of religious consciousness to arise.

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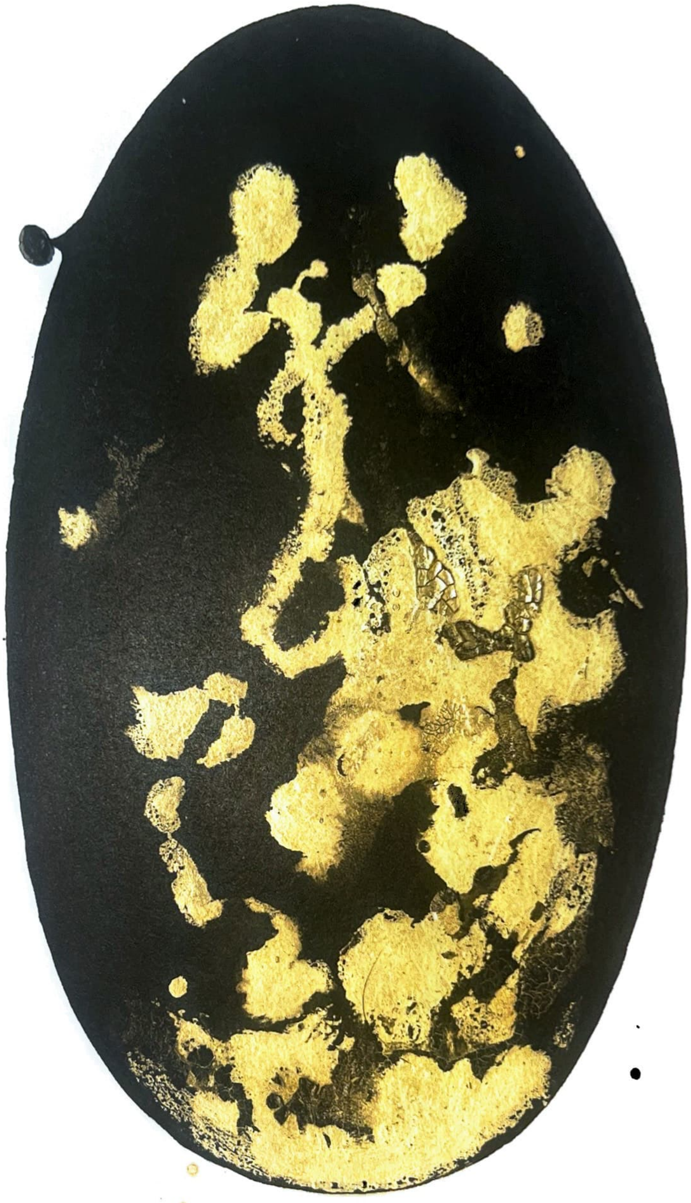
[6] Attar, Farid Ud-Din, *La Conferencia de los Pájaros*, versión de Raficq Abdulla, (Madrid: Gaia, 2002).

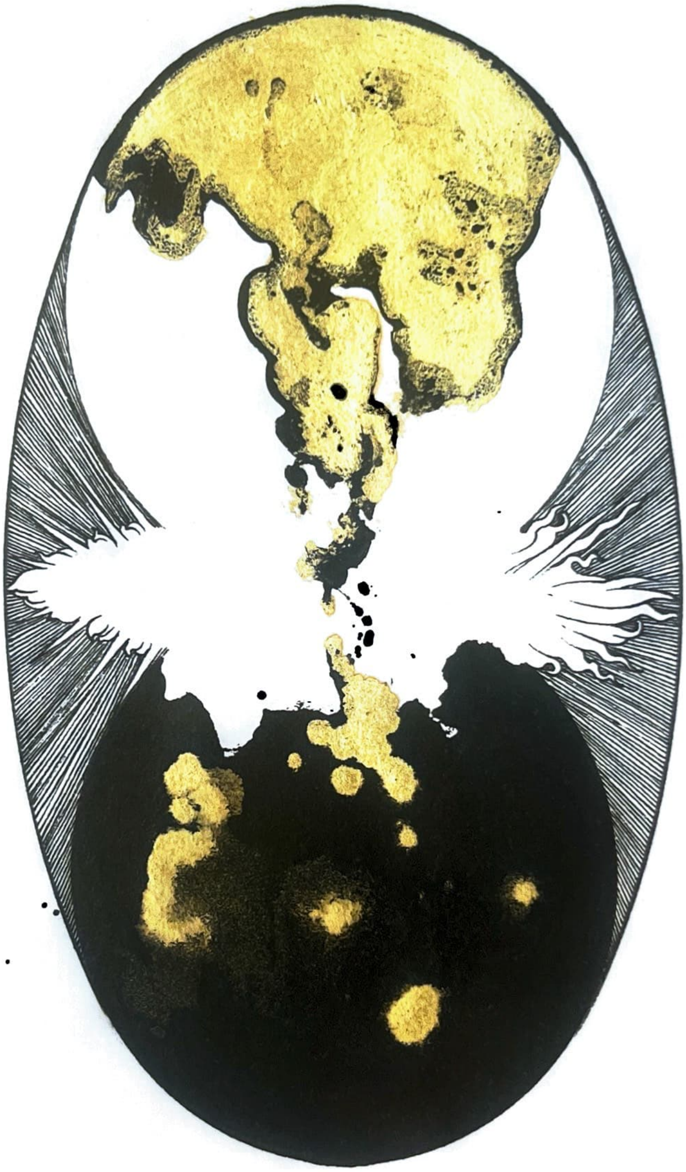
[7] Ibid., p.23

VI. Apocatastasis. *The restoration of all in the All. The egg is closed again. This heterodox notion was held by Origen of Alexandria, and it is a remarkable idea due to its non-duality. Matter and spirit, good and evil, souls and bodies, will all be reabsorbed within the totality, the Pleroma that is the transcendent deity. There can be no "judgement" in this view, for evil has no reality: it is only the confusion of smaller elements, smaller souls that are sparks of the greater personality – no matter how foul or debased they might seem. Therefore, everything appears infinite and blissful to the mystics who have achieved superior states of perception, where there can be no contradiction. A god that must judge and chastise his own creation, while knowing the future and soul of it from the beginning, can only be vicious or a fool. It can only be a demiurge.*

VII. PLEROMA.



I Pleroma



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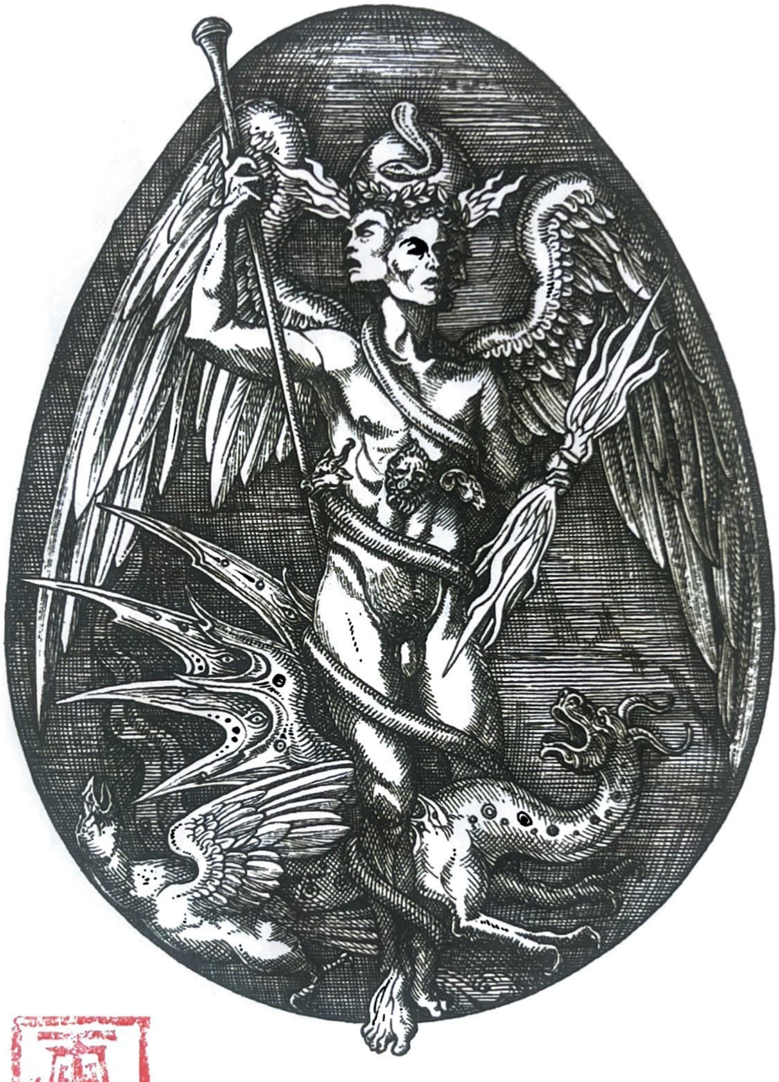
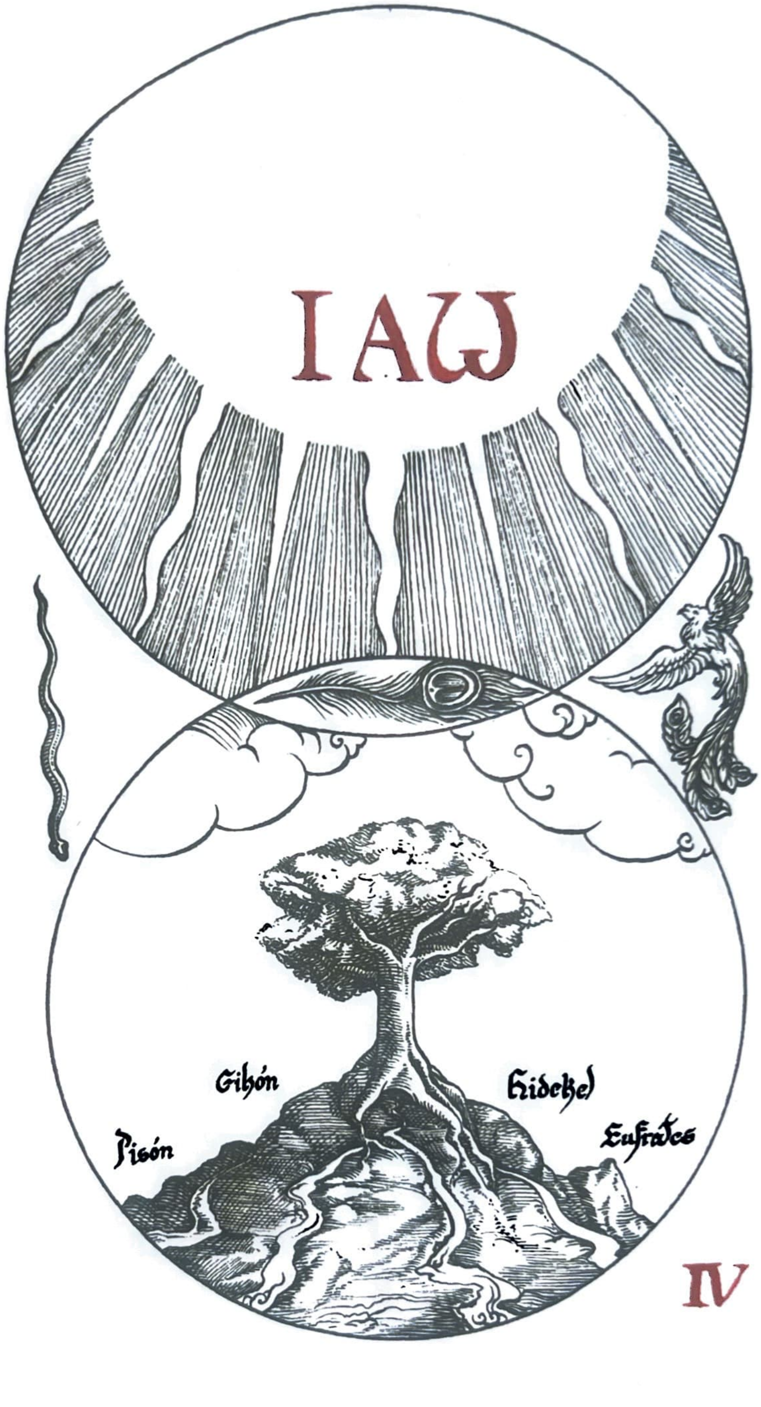
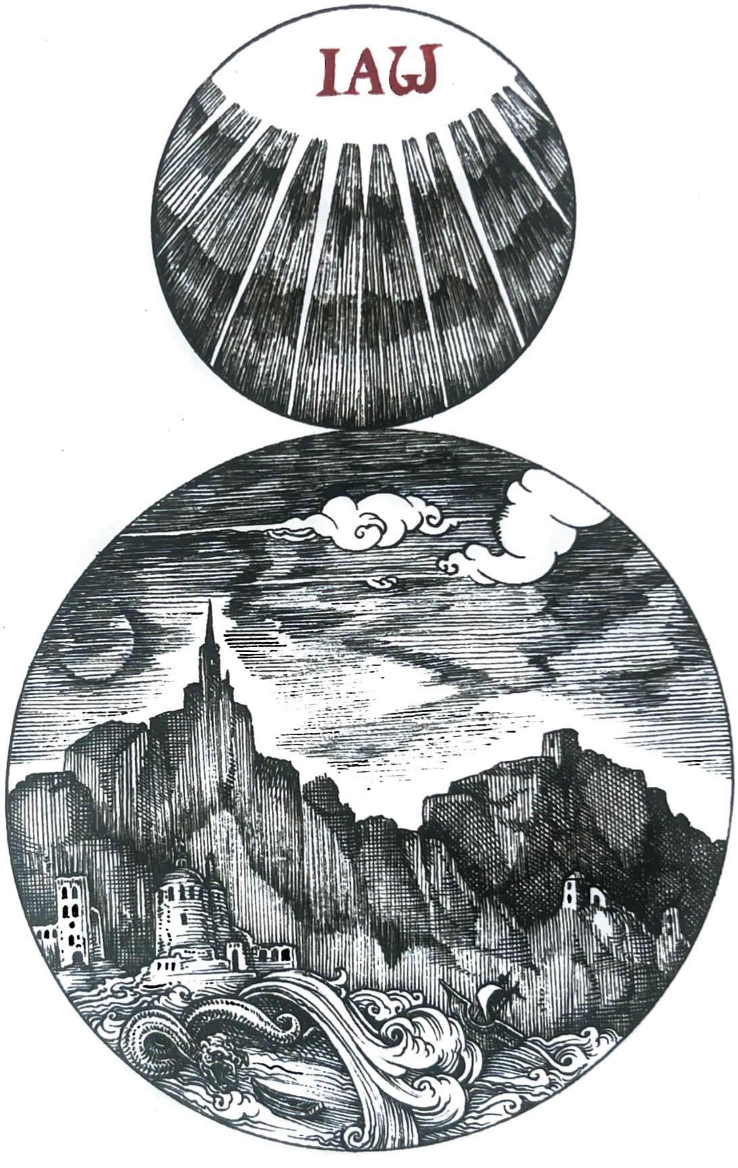


III Fanes Protogono

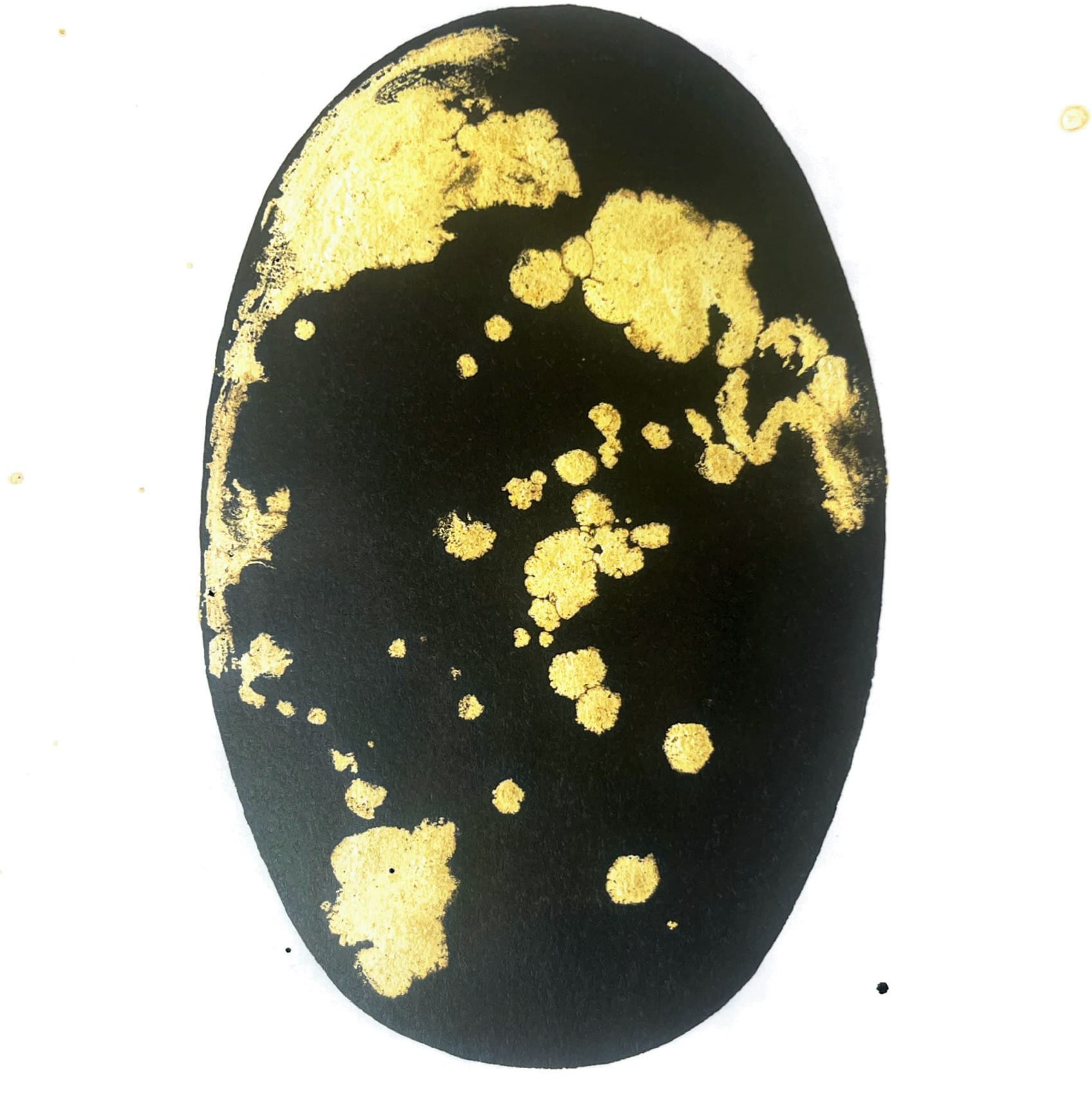

IAω
Gihón
Hidekel
Pisón
Eufrates

IV



V

VI Apocatástasis



VII Pleroma

BASILIDES OF ALEXANDRIA, HERESIARCH.
DISCIPLE OF GLAUCIAS.
GLAUCIAS, DISCIPLE OF PETER.
PETER, DISCIPLE OF CHRIST.

THIS is the genealogy leading from the Christ to the Gnostics, according to the disciples of Basilides.[8] Aside from Simon the Magus, Basilides is often identified as the main teacher and initiator of a Hellenic or Alexandrian lineage of Gnosticism, and as being the creator of the figure known as *Abraxas*,[9] to the point that plenty of gemstones that seemed loosely Gnostic have been commonly – though mistakenly – called *Basilidian* gems.[10]

Yet the actual name written on the gemstones is not even *Abraxas*, but it is *Abrasax*; it can be found written in the Gnostic texts discovered at Nag Hammadi and even in some of the Greek Magical Papyri. It was caused by confusing the Greek letter Σ with Ξ. The inscriptions on the gemstones are very rough carvings and as such, they could have also fostered such misreading. This confusion has lasted for a time, and so the name "Abraxas" appears in Hermann Hesse's *Demian* and Jung's *Septem Sermones*, and so the Gnostic rooster entered popular culture in its misspelled version.

"The Latin Fathers to suit the genius of their own language have transposed the final letters." (King, p. 245)

It is important to note that the name *Abrasax* does also appear on gemstones depicting a plain snake. This is reminiscent of King's hypothesis: Gnosticism was not a mere heresy of Christianity, but the continuation of an ancient serpent or *Agathodaimon* cult, that was at the core of what he called the "Abraxas religion." We dare to intuit that the ancient belief that the serpent did not die by natural causes, unless injured, and that it was instead reborn cyclically by the changing of its skin, was transposed to the figure of the Christ, as allegorical of his own resurrection.

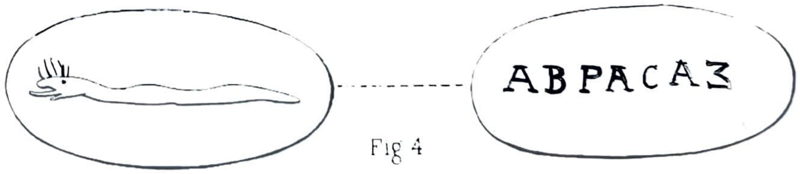


Fig 4

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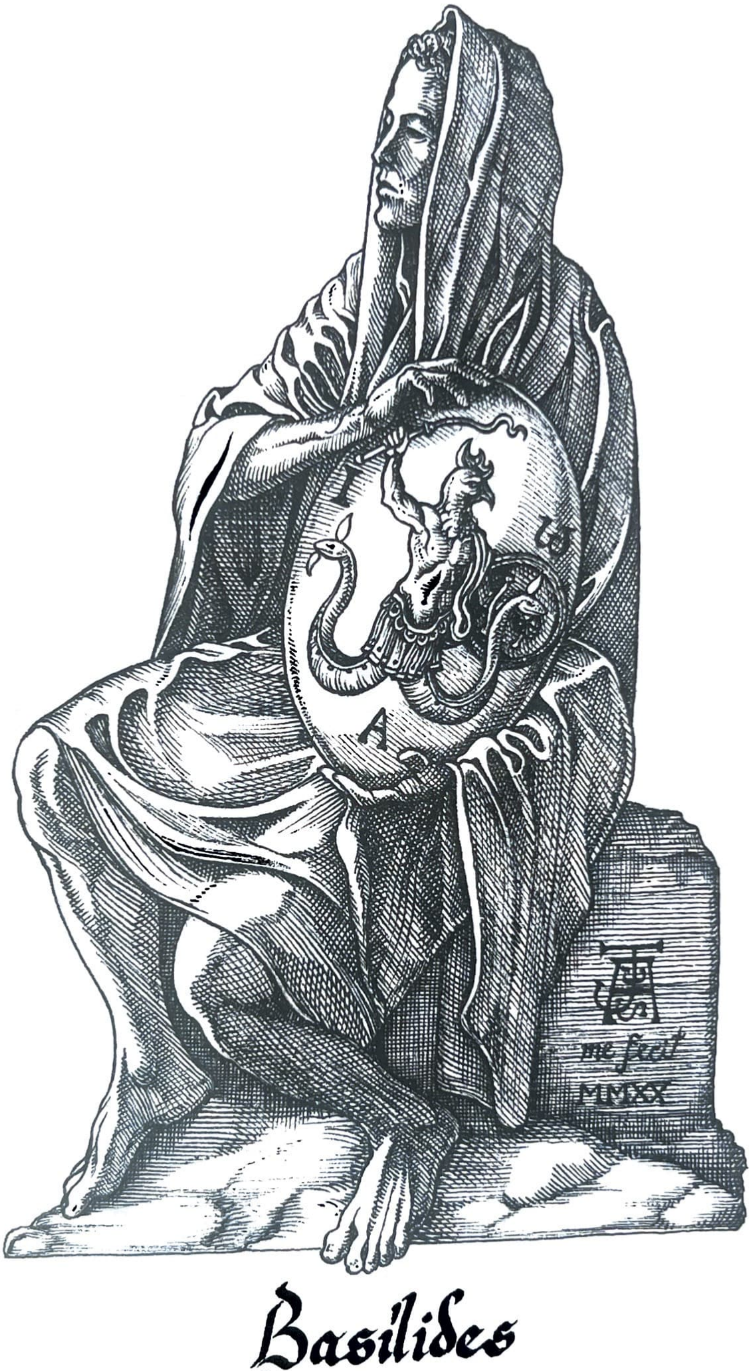
[8] Tixeront, J., *Curso de Patrología* (Barcelona: Editorial Liturgia Española, 1927), p. 76.

[9] King, C. W., *The Gnostics and their Remains: Ancient and Mediaeval* (London: David Nutt, 1887), p. 226.

[10] Such is the case in the treatise by Macarius, Joannes, *Joannis Macarii, Abraxas, seu Apistopistus* (Antwerp: Balthasar Moretus, 1657), where they are called "Gemmæ Basilidianæ."


I
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A
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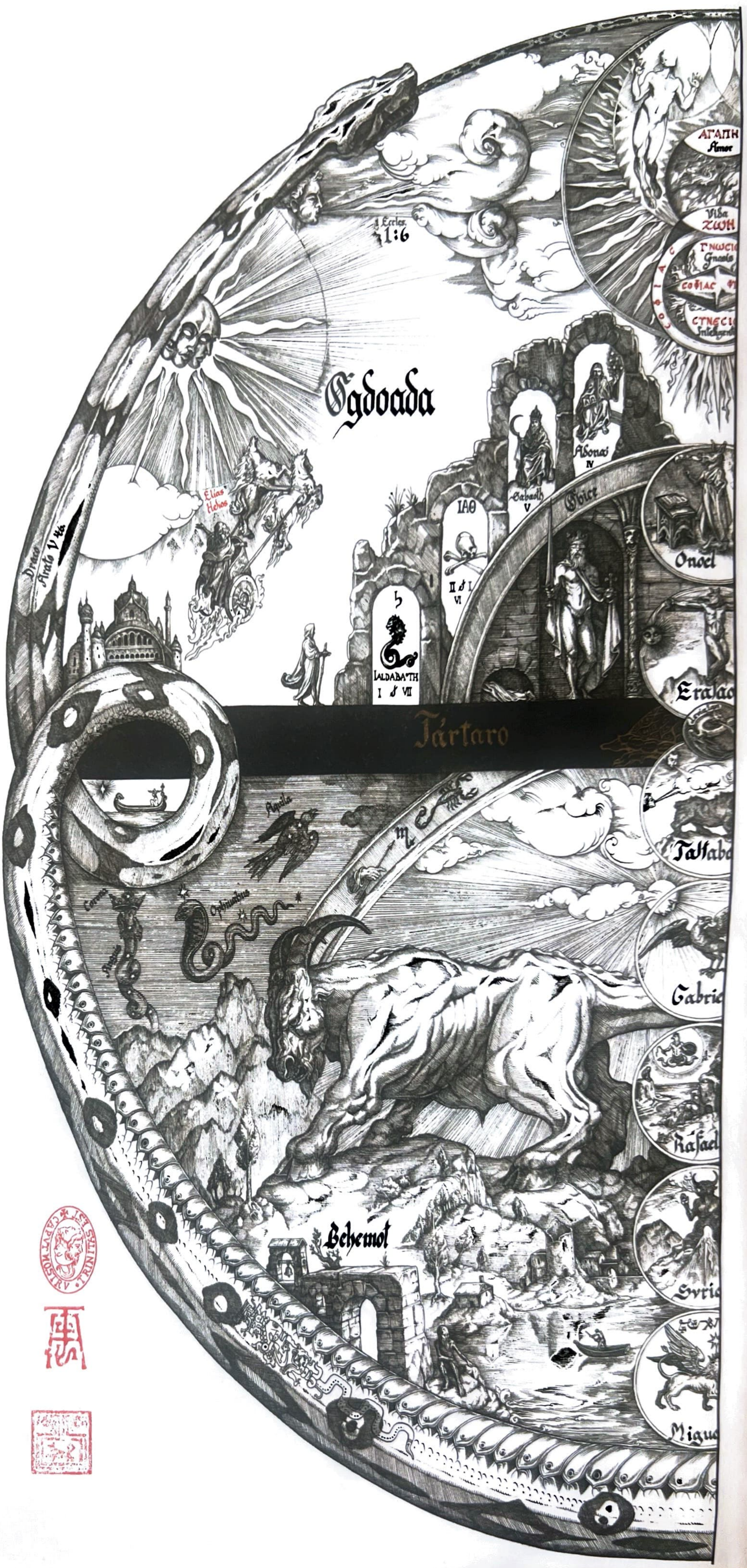
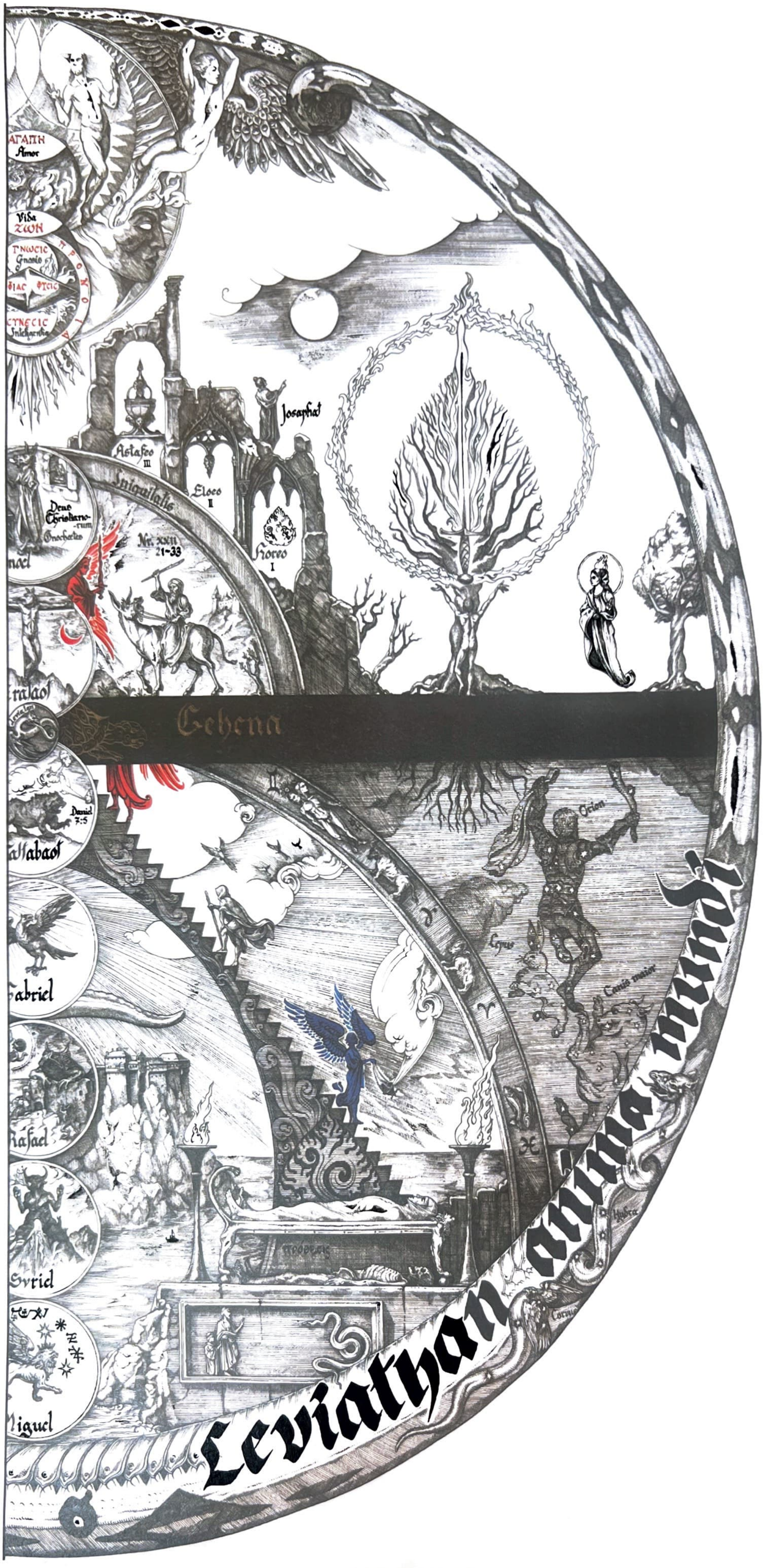
MMXX

Basilides
Heresiarca


Ἐcles. 1:6
ΑΓΑΠΗ
Amor
Vida
ΖΩΗ
ΓΝΩCΙ
Gnosis
ϹΟΦΙΑϹ
ϹΟΦΙΑϹ
CΥΝΕCΙ
Intelige
Ogdoada
Elias
Helios
Draco
Arato V 46
Adonai
IV
Sabaoth
V
ΙΑΩ
II ☿ VI
♄
IALDABAOTH
I ☿ VII
Orice
Onoel
Erata
Tártaro
Aquila
Corona
Anguis
Ophiuchus
♏
Taftab
Gabrie
Rafael
Surie
Migue
Behemot


ΑΓΑΠΗ
Amor
Vida
ΖΩΗ
ΓΝΩCΙC
Gnosis
ΦΙΑC ΦΤCΙC
CΥΝΕCΙC
Inteligentia
ΠΡΟΝΟΙΑ
Josaphat
Astafeo
III
Eloeo
II
Horeo
I
Iniquitatis
Deus Christiano-rum
Onocheetes
Nr. XXII 21-33
Gehena
Daniel 7:5
Sabbaot
Gabriel
Rafael
Suriel
Miguel
Orion
Lepus
Canis maior
Hydra
Corvus
ΠΡΟΘΕCΙC
Leviathan anima mundi

A serpent with a radiated head with the inscription *Abrasax* – according to King this is "one of the few types that can with confidence be attributed to the sect of the Ophites."[11]

But what do we know about *Abrasax*? It is Hippolytus of Rome whom, when exposing the doctrine of the Basilidians, says that according to them there are countless creations distributed through the different realms of the heavens, and that there are 365 heavens, and *Abraxas* is the supreme ruler of them all. It is also said that the numerical value of such a name is 365 and that it encompasses everything, and therefore such is also the measurement of the days in a year.[12] Hippolytus is also, perhaps, the "Latin Father" who miscopied the name in the first place, but we should leave this matter to more skilled researchers.

Abrasax appears written as such in the Coptic Gospel of the Egyptians, among the names of several rulers, being one the "ministers of the four lights" or "those who govern the sun."[13] He does not, however, seem to play a central role in this text – that is ascribed to the sect of the *Sethians*.

It is due to the aspect as supreme Archon that such a figure has been associated with the fullness of the Pleroma and the cosmic egg, divine totality, and non-duality. As a *Pantheos*, the figure is rather monstrous, showing the serpent feet (*Anguipes*, which are particular to giants in classical mythology, not to gods), and to the Indian *Vyala Yaksha* – again, not a *Deva*. The Gnostic rooster is accompanied by several different names in the surviving Gnostic gemstones, such as *Iao*, and names for the Hebrew god (mostly Adonai) or epithets related to Hellenistic solar deities. When examined, this brings forth the question: should we not understand this "Abraxas" figure as a demiurge then? Let us ask: who stands above all heavens and encircles them? The serpent. The great serpent is shown as such in the Ophite Diagram and bears the name *Abrasax* on the gemstone attributed to the Ophites. This is also the role of the serpent *Shesha*, otherwise called the infinite, the primordial, and on whom all the cosmos rests.

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[11] King, C. W., *The Gnostics and their Remains: Ancient and Mediaeval* (London: David Nutt, 1887). Description of Plate A, n.4.

[12] Hippolytus of Rome, *Refutatio* VII, 26: 6. In: *Los Gnósticos*, Volumen II, introducción, traducción y notas de José Montserrat Torrens (Madrid: Gredos, 1991), p. 200.

[13] Vidal Manzanares, César, *Los Evangelios Gnósticos* (Barcelona: Martínez Roca, 1991), p. 98.

The Ophite Diagram

THERE was undoubtedly a personal fascination with this figure since the first time one was confronted with its description. Where did it all come from? How was it possible that no artist had attempted to reconstruct such an awe-inspiring vision, such a detailed map of the other world (or worlds)?

THE OPHITE DIAGRAM: *See* pp. 94–95.

Ten years passed between reading the description of the Ophite Diagram, and finally starting to draw it. There seemed to be no time for such a cyclopic endeavour, moreover, the description seemed incoherent, with circles upon circles that did not even fit inside one another.[14] Deciding its structure took considerably longer than drawing it at last, it might not be devoid of errors. We will be thankful for any contribution or correction that could be made to this diagram, that is still too ambitious for our own skill.

Highly detailed descriptions or "maps" of the underworld tend to appear as rather late developments in religious history, as the case of the *Bardo Thodol*. These absolute certainties for what is completely beyond life tend to be considered the esoteric or even magical aspects of a tradition. It might also be the case that they mostly pertain to oral traditions that have been kept as an initiatory secret and are now lost to the modern world. *Mudra*, *Mantra*, and *Mandala*, the three *Ms* of Tantric practice, have perfect parallels in Gnosticism, as they spoke of "seals" marked by initiation; they preserved secret formulae to be recited at specific ritual moments, and they seemed to have this superb map of the unconscious.[15] The appearance of Tantra within the context of Hinduism is rather late and medieval, but the finest defenders of its theology hold it as a perfectly consistent part of a larger revelation.[16] Contrasted with this, the doctrine of the Ophites has a surprisingly early appearance within Christianity, and seemed to have emerged fully formed – if we even consider it a part of such a religion.

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[14] We have found and based our version on three reconstructions: Logan, Alastair, *The Gnostics: Identifying an Early Christian Cult* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2006), p. 42; Matter, Jacques, *Histoire critique du Gnosticisme* (Paris: F. G. Levrault, 1826), vol. III, Plate I, D. and Witte, Bernd, *Das Ophitendiagramm nach Origenes' Contra Celsum VI 22–38* (Altenberge: Oros Verlag, 1993), pp. 142–143. I thank Frater Acher for pointing out the last of these sources to me. None of these reconstructions includes all aspects in one circle, as stated by Origen.

[15] Giuseppe Tucci called these figures "psychocosmograms." C. G. Jung developed several interpretations and painted his own Mandalas, several of which can be found in his *Red Book*. His psychological approach saw them as maps towards the self, symbolical of the process of individuation. See: Tucci, Giuseppe, *Teoría y Práctica del Mandala* (Barcelona: Barral, 1974).

The serpent plays an important role in Tantric symbolism, just as it did for the whole ancient world. When comparing all doctrines, revering the serpent is not the delusion of idolaters – her reverence among the Ophite Christians was older than both Augustine and Thomas Aquinas. On the contrary, banishing her from the symbols of wisdom was Christianity's primordial mistake.

The Ophite Diagram about which Origen and Celsus discuss, was certainly a whole mystagogy encoded in one hyper-complex picture. It was seen by two outsiders who took it with contempt, and whose record we preserve. It is most likely one of the truly precious treasures of esoteric Christianity.

Or Heresy.

From here onwards, we will include a translation of excerpts from the Ophite Diagram's description by Origen,[17] in *Contra Celsum* VI 24–38 and include our own personal commentaries in the notes.

> 24. In the diagram were drawn ten circles separated from one another, but united within one greater circle which they designated as the soul of the universe and which was called Leviathan.
>
> The impious diagram stated that the Leviathan, so clearly condemned by the prophet is the soul that penetrates the universe. We also found Behemoth named, as situated below the lowest circle.[18] The author of this abominable diagram drew this

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[16] It is conceptualized as a "Fifth Veda" in: Avalon, Arthur, *Principles of Tantra: The Tantratattva of Sriyukta Siva Candra Vidyarnava Bhattacarya Mahodaya* (Madras: Ganesh & Co., 1960).

[17] We are basing our excerpts primarily on the Spanish translation by José Montserrat Torrens published in *Los Gnósticos*, Volumen II, introducción, traducción y notas de José Montserrat Torrens (Madrid: Gredos, 1991), pp. 251–260.

[18] Here our drawing takes an important divergence since Behemoth is drawn at the left side of the circles and not below them. We wanted to emphasize the strength of this mythical being as lord of all creatures, and our depiction is partly influenced by the one by William Blake in his illustrations for the *Book of Job* (1826) plate 15. We have depicted Job as a small naked lepper in the lower landscape.

Leviathan in the circle and its centre, so that he wrote his name twice.[19]

Celsus also says, that the diagram was divided by a thick black line, which they said, was the Gehenna and the Tartarus.[20]

…

27. The only one that imparts the seal is the one called the Father, he who receives the seal is called the Son, and answers: I have been anointed with the white chrism that stems from the Tree of Life.[21] A thing that we have not heard to take place among these sectarians.

Following this he indicates the cipher furnished by those who transmit the seal, which is of seven angels present at each side of the soul of the dying body; some are angels of light, the others are called Archontic, and he says that the prince of the Archontic angels is called the cursed god.[22]

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[19] This indicates a curious fractal pattern of self-similarity, where the larger image is repeated at the centre. This also happens in Jung's drawing *Systema Mundi Totius* (1916). Should we understand this aspect as an indication of *Panentheism* since the Leviathan pervades the whole universe but is also beyond it?

[20] Based on this, our rendition of the diagram depicts the lower half as the sensible world, and the upper half as the metaphysical one. This line was not to be crossed unless initiation had taken place, otherwise the soul would reincarnate in the material world. We have freely chosen to depict a golden tortoise at the centre of the black line since its ancient Greek name stood for "dweller of the Tartarus." But this being is also the *Axis Mundi* in Indian cosmology, as *Kurma Avatara* helped churning the sea of milk to regain the Soma for the gods. This division of a circle in two halves could also be related to the ancient Egyptian cosmology where the sun was believed to travel through the underworld during the night. Thus, encircled by the serpent, an initiate is travelling the boat that served as the after-death vehicle of the pharaohs. It is therefore interesting to note that the whole diagram resembles the Egyptian hieroglyph for lake (№ 37) within a circle, or the Greek letter Θ.

[21] We have included this excerpt as an interesting example of the initiatory "seal," akin to the *Mahamudra* of esoteric Buddhism, and certainly to the Christian rites of ordination for both priests and kings, which trace their origins back to Elijah and Melchizedek. Origen immediately denies the fact that such a rite took place among the Ophites.

[22] This reference to the dying body is why we have chosen to depict a mourning rite in our image, to stress the fact that this diagram illustrated an after-death journey, which motivated our previous comparison to the *Bardo Thodol*. The seven Archons are thus depicted at the left side of the corpse, but from the "angels of light" no further description is given. Our depiction combines, in an Alexandrian fashion, the Greek rite of the *Prothesis* with the Egyptian depictions of the body prepared

Following this, Origen, clearly disturbed by this material, discusses how he considers that Celsus has been confused by the doctrines of such heretics who are not Christians at all. To emphasize this claim, he states that no one is admitted in their meetings unless he has denied and cursed Jesus. He sees their doctrines as delirious insanity, and the claims of Celsus as ridiculous in considering them Christians.

We can easily see that Origen was exaggerating to distance himself from the Ophites, but for the Ophites, the Christ was the serpent; no denial or blasphemy was needed for an exposition of their doctrines. On the one hand, it is truthful to admit that the Ophite doctrine was the closest thing one could possibly find to a primordial form of Luciferianism. However, the fully formed image of the devil as "that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan" (Revelation 20:2) is a syncretism of various biblical passages that is only attested in the book of Revelation, whose acceptance into the biblical canon was probably later than the existence of the Ophites themselves. Simply put, they had no use for a devil; the devil was the Judeo-Christian God, transfigured into a lion-headed serpent.

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for embalming. The two fundamentally different ways of treating the corpse are hinted: in burial the body is inevitably destined to decay, and in the funeral pyre the soul ascends through the smoke. Jacob's ladder emerges from the dead man's mouth, which the initiated soul climbs, among angels and birds. The pervasive tradition of seven angels may be traced back to the book of Tobit 12:15, where Raphael declares himself as one of the seven spirits before God (*Ego enim sum Raphael angelus, unus ex septem, qui adstamus ante Dominum*). But the particularity of the Archons is how they are, in fact, the traditional seven angels transfigured into wicked beings. Only in this excerpt is the Judeo-Christian god referred to as a "cursed god" and this, perhaps to Origen's distortion, as his aim was to make clear how the Ophites were by no means Christians for him. To decorate the base on which the mourning rite takes place, we have included a stele of *Zeus Meilichios* from Eteonos in Boeotia, from the fourth century BC. Currently preserved at the *Pergammon* Museum in Berlin. This is a way of hinting once again at the hypothetical serpent cult from antiquity, as regarding this stele Jane Ellen Harrison states: "The human-shaped Zeus has slipped himself quietly into the place of the old snake-god. Art sets plainly forth what has been dimly shadowed in ritual and mythology. It is not that Zeus the Olympian has an underworld aspect; it is the cruder fact that he of the upper air, of the thunder and lightning, extrudes an ancient serpent-demon of the lower world, Meilichios. Meilichios is no foreign Moloch, he is home-grown, autochthonous before the formulation of Zeus." In: Harrison, Jane Ellen, *Prolegomena to the study of Greek religion* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1903), pp. 19–20. In the background we have taken the freedom to depict Mount Athos, where in 1842 the books IV–X of the *Refutation of All Heresies* or *Philosophoumena* by Hippolytus of Rome were found.

From this follow the names of the seven Archons:

1. Lion, *Michael*. We have based our depiction in a talisman of the "Mithraic type" reproduced by King (Plate L) ("Lion" was also one of the initiatory degrees in the cult of Mithras) and combined this with the winged and crowned lion of alchemy.

2. Bull, *Suriel*. Whom we have chosen to depict as the old Moloch-Baal, that terrible anthropophagus bull-headed deity.

3. Dragon or amphibious being, *Raphael*. Our divergence based on the "amphibious" description is to depict this Archon as a frog. In his realm, several frogs worship *Abrasax* with ceremonial righteousness, for *He is the lord of toads and frogs* (Jung, *The Red Book, Scrutinies*, p. 350).

4. Eagle, *Gabriel*. The eagle looks face to face at the sun, as the ancients believed.

5. Bear, *Taltabaot*. The ursiform beast stands among the four winds, as seen by the prophet Daniel (Daniel 7:5).

6. Dog, *Erataot*. We have included our depiction of the Alexamenos graffito, a dog-headed Christ-Anubis. This unorthodox crucifixion also coincides with the centre of the diagram, as standing on the *Axis Mundi*. In fact, in the Middle Ages, Jerusalem (and more specifically, Golgotha) was believed to be the centre of the world.

7. Ass, *Tafabaot, Onoel* or *Tartaraot*. For the image of this Archon, we have chosen the blasphemy recorded by Tertulian in his Apology, where a renegade Jew exhibits a caricature of the Christian God with the title *Deus Christianorum Onochoetes*, described as *a personage with the ears of an ass, a cloak, a book, and a cloven foot.*[23] We have accompanied this monstrous being by the story of the mad prophet Balaam told in the book of Numbers 22:22–33, when god spoke through the mouth of a donkey. At the same time, Balaam stands for the man lacking initiation, as he was unable to see the angel before him, while his animal could.

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[23] De Labriolle, Pierre, *The History and Literature of Christianity: From Tertullian to Boethius*, Translated by Herbert Wilson (New York: Routledge, 2012), p. 67.

Origen is right when saying that several of these names do not circulate among Christians, nor have they been preserved among the traditions of Apocryphal angels – that we know of. The initiate was to cross the "barrier of iniquity" by reciting ritual formulae, to pass the *gates of the Archons that are eternally closed.* However, these invocations include seven further names, which seemed inconsistent with what was previously stated. We have chosen to depict the gates of the Archons horizontally and the animal-headed Archons vertically to alleviate this inconsistency. It is, however, likely that they might have corresponded with each other as both have planetary spheres ascribed to them. After the seven spheres had been crossed began the Ogdoad, the empyreal eighth sky, beyond the stars, corresponding to metaphysical reality, that is the upper half of our circle. The invocations to be recited at each gate and that we have depicted are as follows:[24]

> Solitary King, blindfold, unconscious oblivion, I salute you, first power, guarded by a provident spirit and by wisdom (Sophia), from where I am a pure envoy, already participating in the light of the Son and the Father. May grace be with me, yes father, with me.[25]
>
> *Ialdabaoth*. Oh you, engendered first and seventh, to rule boldly, *Ialdabaoth*, who are the main logos of a pure intellect, perfect work along with the Son and the Father,[26] I hold a symbol with the figure of Life,[27] after opening to the world the door that you closed for your aeon; I trespass, free again, your dominion. May grace be with me, yes father, be with me. (And they say that the planet Saturn has a sympathy for the lion-shaped Archon.)[28]

---

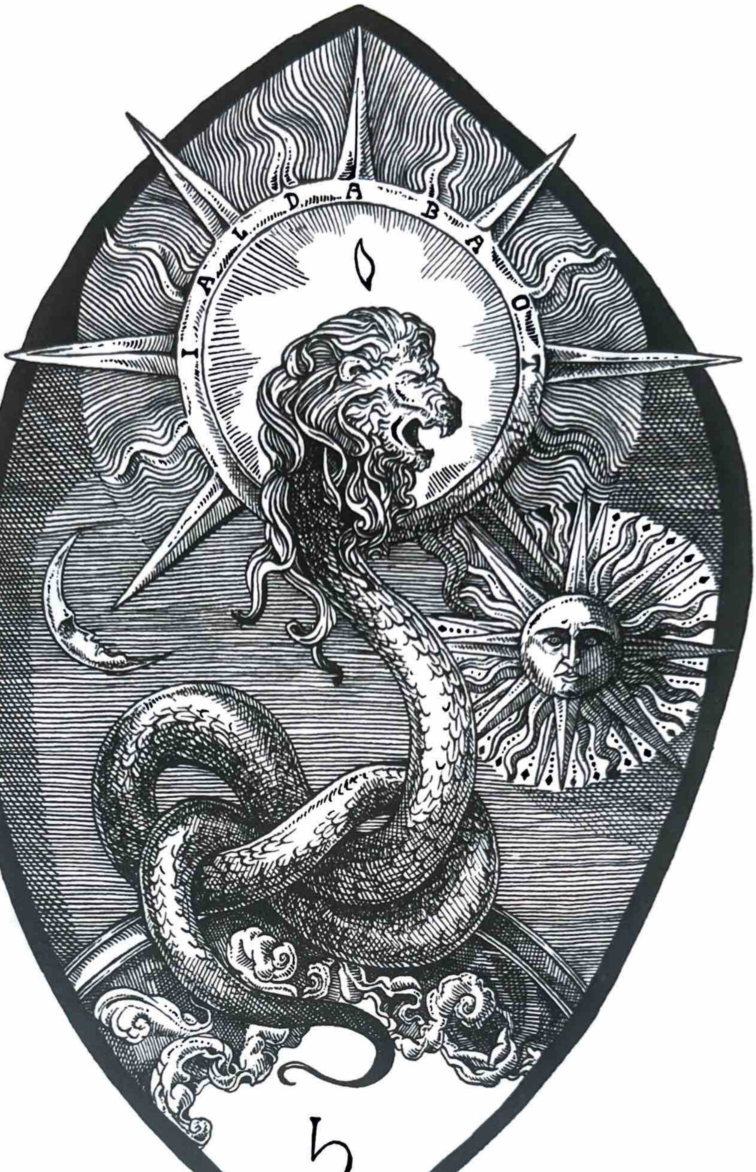
[24] A similar list is given in the book *On the Origin of The World* from Nag Hammadi.

[25] After ascending through Jacob's ladder, the pilgrim, the initiate, our beloved "keen wanderer" from *(h)Auroræ*, salutes the blindfolded king, depicted as a naked emperor, and sneaks out of his realm. He is then ready to knock at the gate of Ialdabaoth.

[26] It seems that faint praises are made to the Archons, as a small act of worship that will allow one to pass each gate.

[27] Perhaps referring to the previously mentioned Tree of Life.

[28] This is the reason why we have included a simple sign of Saturn at the feet of the following figure. Since this image was drawn, it has become well known to a point beyond our control. It was reproduced in *A Second Nature* (Amsterdam: Aeon Sophia Press, 2017) and including it again here is a way of reaffirming authorship. After all, the present book is the culmination of a project from which this image was an early piece.



Oh you, prince of the occult mysteries of the Son and the Father, who shines in the night,[29] *Iao*, second and first, lord of death,[30] inheritance of the innocent,[31] holding my own obedient spirit[32] as a symbol I am ready to trespass your dominion, once defeated by a living word from one who comes forth from you. May grace be with me, yes father, be with me.

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[29] Following the Ptolemaic planetary order in an inverse sense, this is, starting from Saturn, the planet corresponding to *Iao* would be Jupiter. This compliment could respond to the fact that Jupiter is the brightest celestial body in the night sky.

[30] The name of the meditational deity *Yamantaka* has a similar connotation.

[31] If this should imply inherited from birth, this could be understood as a reference to reincarnation.

Archon of the fifth potency, powerful Sabaoth,[33] defender of the law of your own creation freed by grace, that is an even more powerful pentad, let me pass, because I hold the symbol of your art, preserved by the image of a figure, a body freed by the pentad.[34] May grace be with me, yes father, be with me.

Archon of the third gate,[35] *Astaphaios*, guardian of the first spring of water, looking at me as an initiate, let me pass, for I have been purified by the spirit of a virgin, you who contemplates the essence of the world. May grace be with me, yes father, be with me.

Archon of the second gate, *Elaios*, let me pass, for I bear the symbol of your own mother,[36] one grace hidden for the power of powers. May grace be with me, yes father, be with me.

You who boldly trespassed the barrier of fire[37] reaching the dominion of the first gate, *Horaios*, let me pass, you can see the symbol of your power, destroyed by the figure of the Tree of Life, taken as an image and likeness of the innocent. May grace be with me, yes father, be with me.

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[32] Montserrat Torrens leaves this word as a lacuna as it variates between different manuscripts and its meaning is never fully clear, but Kotschau proposes a reading of *hypekoon nôun* as "obedient spirit," which fits the Gnostic pattern that alternates between obedience and transgression. See: Koetschau, Paul, *Kritische Bemerkungen zu meiner Ausgabe von Origenes' Exhortatio, Contra Celsum, De oratione: Entgegnung auf die von Paul Wendland in den göttingischen gelehrten Anzeigen 1899 Nr. 4. veröffentlichte Kritik* (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1899).

[33] We have freely chosen to depict Sabaoth as the vision in Revelation 14:14, "with a crown of gold on his head and a sharp sickle in his hand."

[34] This inevitably reminds us of the way in which Agrippa represented the human body as defined by a pentagram. And also how Heinrich Khunrath and other Christian Cabbalists conceptualized the name of Jesus as a "Pentagrammaton."

[35] In the book *On the Origin of the World*, there is another, fourth Archon named *Adonaios*, whose name and invocation are missing in *Contra Celsum*. We have chosen to depict Adonai following the vision of John in Revelation 1:8–20. It is also worth mentioning that in On the *Origin of the World*, every Archon is described as androgynous and with a consort which is his feminine counterpart.

[36] This could refer to *Achamot*, mother figure for the demiurgue and a lower aspect of *Sophia*.

[37] Based on these mysterious descriptions we have chosen to depict these three last Archons in an aniconic way, as a fountain, emptiness, and fire. On top of the archway, we have placed a figure named Josaphat, he has an *ushnisha* and points at the moon. Why? Because the legend of Barlaam and Josphat was a Christianized

After this, comes the vision so strongly repeated throughout initiation: the Tree of Life with the fiery sword in a circle of fire. Once the gates of the Archons have been passed, what lies ahead is ultimate reality, the experience of radical knowledge. We have chosen to emphasize the androgynous conception of the godhead by depicting it after the miniature of Genesis in the *Bedford Hours* (1410–1430). Origen's description becomes more obscure at this point and he dismisses what may have been an extraordinarily complex system as an admixture of "prophetic oracles" and "circles upon circles," which he considers might have been a misreading of a passage from the book of Ecclesiastes 1:6: "The wind blows to the south and turns to the north; round and round it goes, ever returning on its course." He recounts that they also spoke of a heavenly church of a superior Aeon, which we have modelled after the Hagia Sophia, and an aspect of Sophia called the virgin *Prunikos*, identified with the bleeding woman in the Gospels.

Outside all of this, we have populated the higher reality with Elijah, the prophet identified with ascension, riding his fiery chariot next to the sun, a symbol alike the chariot of Helios. The sun, dark and three-faced, is modelled after the painting of the vision of Saint Augustine by Filippo Lippi from 1460, currently preserved at the Hermitage Museum. Why? To point out that this is not the visible sun but, as Ficino wrote, that *God is the sun of the sun.*[38]

The description of the last three, higher circles, is an utterly confusing text. We owe our reconstruction primarily to Witte's work. From top to bottom, the words inscribed are:

Love (Agape)
Life (Zoe)
Providence of Wisdom (Sophias Pronoia) – on the border of the circle
Nature of Wisdom (Sophias Physis)
Intelligence (Kinesis)

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account of the life of the Buddha, who is usually represented thus, outside the wheel of reincarnation and becoming (*Bhavachakra*). This way we include a visual hint of the similarities between Gnosis and Buddhism.

[38] *The Letters of Marsilio Ficino: translated from the Latin by members of the Language Department of the School of Economic Science* (London: Shepeard-Walwyn, 1983), pp. 37–38.

"Father" and "Son" were meant to be written inside of the uppermost circle, but we have chosen to depict them as two similar figures of light instead. At one side, Sophia, winged and nude, emerges as the "first thought" (*Ennoia*) of the perfect mind, breaking out of the fullness of the Pleroma, and thus commencing the myth on the origin of the world which we have already dealt with. And so, the circle keeps spinning.

These three upper circles, the most mysterious part, remind us of that text called the *Trimporphic Protennoia*. They also recall Dante's vision in *Paradiso* XXXIII[39] lines 114–117:

In the deep and bright essence of that exalted Light,
three circles appeared to me.
they had three different colors, but all of them were
of the same dimension.

* * * * *
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[39] Alighieri, Dante, *The Divine Comedy, Translated by Allen Mandelbaum* (London: Everyman's Library, 1995). Translated by Allen Mandelbaum.

A Theology of the Serpent Saviour

HOW could the saviour, so often described as the perfect form of man, be a snake, the enemy of man? Origen asked this, as he could not understand how the Ophites, so close to him and to the earliest form of Christianity, could have inverted its symbolism so completely.

But animal symbolism is not alien at all to Christianity. The most ancient symbol for the Messiah being the fish – or is it the lamb? The four animals from Ezekiel's vision were adopted by the four evangelists. During the Middle Ages, even more imaginative animals were identified with Christ, such as the unicorn or the pelican, who was believed to feed its children with its own blood.

We have already introduced the notion of Prefigurations, how the prophets and stories of the Old Testament were thought to be predictions of the New. In the *Speculum Humanae Salvationis*, in which we have based the first part of our iconographic programme, the New Testament mirrored the Old, and thus images of both were presented together, as mysterious prophecies and their respective fulfilments. The *Biblia Pauperum* was an earlier example of this genre, which brought together scenes of both testaments and their prophets in tightly packed compositions which resembled small altars. This was, at the same time, an evolution from the *Bible Moralisée*, but encoded into a fully visual language. As such, the *Biblia Pauperum* embodies the paradox that it is meant for the "poor," but its visual analogies may appear as erudite, even esoteric to the modern reader.

We have recreated a woodcut from a Netherlandish *Biblia Pauperum* in the British Museum, dating from 1465, (Museum number: 1845,0809.26, sheet 25) in which two parallels for the Messiah that constitute animal symbolisms are given: the lamb and the snake.

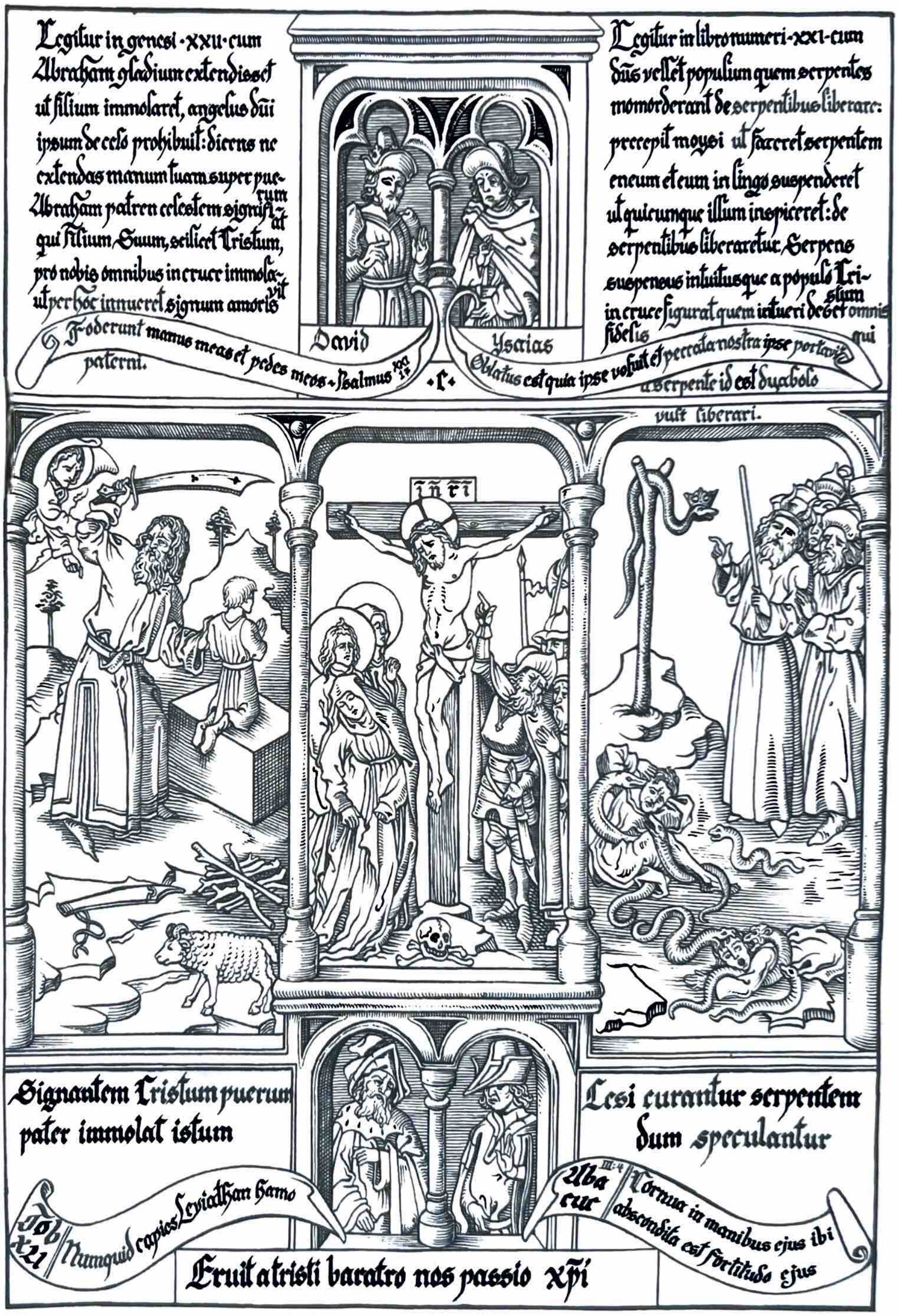
The main passage for the Ophite exegesis is to be found in John 3:14:

> *Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up.*

Although not included in this composition, the reference to this idea is implicit.

This sheet of the *Biblia Pauperum* reads:

> *Legitur in Genesi, xxii capitulo, [quod] cum Abraham gladium extendisset ut filium immolaret, angelus Domini ipsum de celo prohibuit dicens ne extendas manum tuam super puerum. Abraham Patren Celestem significat qui Filium Suum, scilicet Cristum, pro nobis omnibus in cruce immolavit ut per hoc innueret signum amoris paterni.*



Legitur in genesi ·xxii· cum Abraham gladium extendisset ut filium immolaret, angelus dñi ipsum de celo prohibuit: dicens ne extendas manum tuam super puerum Abraham patren celestem significat qui Filium Suum, scilicet Cristum, pro nobis omnibus in cruce immolavit ut per hoc innueret signum amoris paterni.

Foderunt manus meas et pedes meos · Psalmus xxi 17

Legitur in libro numeri ·xxi· cum dñs vellet populum quem serpentes momorderant de serpentibus liberare: precepit moysi ut faceret serpentem eneum et eum in lingo suspenderet ut quicumque illum inspiceret: de serpentibus liberaretur. Serpens suspensus intuitusque a populo Cristum in cruce figurat quem intueri debet omnis fidelis qui a serpente id est dyabolo vult liberari.

Oblatus est quia ipse voluit et peccata nostra ipse portavit

Signantem Cristum puerum pater immolat istum

Lesi curantur serpentem dum speculantur

Job xxi / Numquid capies Leviathan hamo

Eruit a tristi baratro nos passio xp̄i

Abacuc III:4 / Cornua in manibus ejus ibi abscondita est fortitudo ejus

I thank my dear friend Jean Carlo Flores de Paz for the help with the Latin translations and contractions, as well as with classical tongues in general. In the original *Bliblia Pauperum* the Latin text is heavily contracted.

We read in Genesis, chapter 22, that when Abraham raised his hand to kill his son, the angel of the Lord of Heaven impeded it, saying: "Do not raise your hand against the child." Abraham signifies (or symbolizes) the Heavenly Father, who sacrificed His Son, namely, Christ, for all of us on the cross, so that he could show us a sign of His paternal love.

David: Foderunt manus meas et pedes meos.
David: They pierced my hands and my feet (Psalms 22:16).

Versus: Signantem Cristum puerum pater immolat istum.
Verse: The Father who sacrifices his son symbolizes Christ.

Job XLI: Numquid capies leviathan hamo.
Job XLI: Can you pull in Leviathan with a fishhook.

Legitur in Libro Numeri, xxi capitulo, quod cum Dominus vellet populum quem serpentes momorderant de serpentibus liberare, precepit Moysi ut faceret serpentem eneum et eum in ligno suspenderet ut quicumque illum inspiceret de serpentibus liberaretur. Serpens suspensus intuitusque a populo Cristum in cruce figurat quem intu[eri] debet omnis fidel[is] qui a serpente id est dyabolo vult liberari.
We read in the Book of Numbers, chapter 21, how when the Lord wanted to save the people from the snakes that had bitten them, He ordered Moses to make a brazen serpent and put it on a pole, so that all who looked at it got saved from the snakes. The serpent who was hanged from a pole and was beheld by the people prefigures Christ on the cross, whom all the faithful should contemplate to be freed from the snake, that is the Devil.

Ysaias: Oblatus est quia ipse voluit et peccata nostra ipse portavit.
Isaiah: He was offered by his own will and charged with our sins.

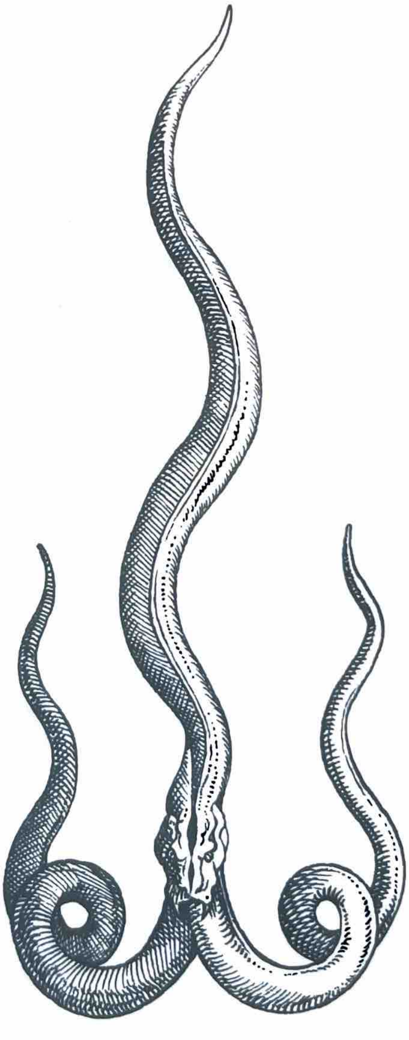
Versus: Lesi curantur serpentem dum speculantur.
Verse: The wounded are cured when they behold the serpent.

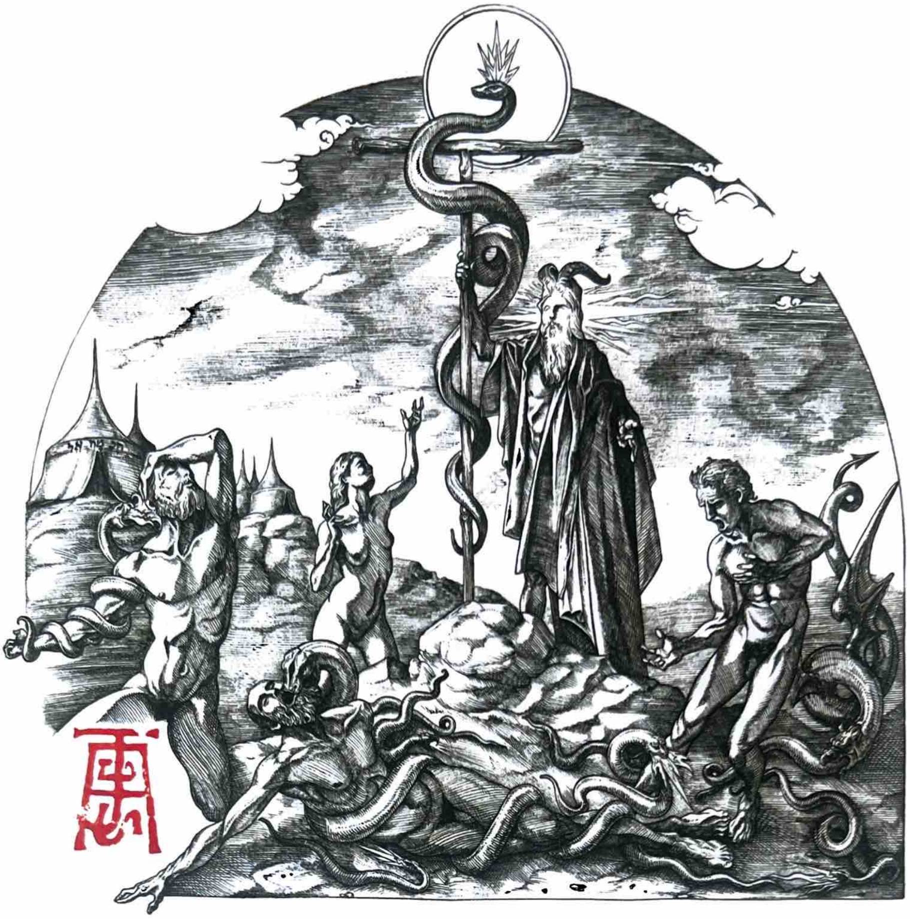
Abacuc III: Cornua in manibus ejus ibi abscondita est fortitudo ejus.
Habakkuk: Rays flashed from his hands, where his power was hidden. (Habakkuk 3:4)

Versus: Eruit a tristi baratro nos passio Cristi.
Verse: The passion of Christ saves us from the dark abyss.

It is interesting to note that the snakes which torment the people are identified with the devil, but they are not described as such in the narrative of the Book of Numbers. At the same time, the brazen serpent hanging from a pole is identified with Christ. So, they are both serpents; how could this be? And here lies the interesting paradox of this symbol: the brazen serpent is the *pharmakon*, the poison that cures poison, it is a symbol of non-duality. Thus, when John the Baptist calls the Pharisees "You brood of vipers!" (Matthew 3:7) he might be repeating the same desert analogy from the Book of Numbers; and the one to oppose them was the Christ, the most perfect serpent, as he did, in defiance of the ancient law.

The analogy between Abraham sacrificing Isaac and the Father sacrificing His Son is much more well-known. The sacrificial substitute for Isaac was the lamb, and from here stems the most famous animal symbol of Christianity: the Lamb of God, which was also repeated by John the Baptist (John 1:29).





THE horns of Moses appeared in the *Vulgata*, translated from the Hebrew *keren*,[40] which could be understood both as *rays* or *horns*. Modern readers with a Protestant background like to point this out simply as a mistranslation by Saint Gerome, which expresses their contempt for both Catholicism and the Middle Ages as barbaric things; but this only confirms their own ignorance.

We have proudly adopted the horns of Moses as ancient symbols of authority and power, just as his staff – combined these with his shining face – are all symbols of his priestly dignity. We will develop further on the different aspects of his representation that we have adopted.

The people tormented by the serpents are partly inspired by a plate from Blake's *First Book of Urizen*, 1794 (The British Museum, London, Copy D. page 5). Blake interpreted a similar iconography – that of Laocoön – in the most original, imaginative, and plainly mad way, as being *Jah & his two Sons Satan & Adam* as they were copied from the Cherubim of Solomon Temple by three Rhodians. (Laocoön, 1826–7).

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[40] For an in-depth analysis on the topic, see: Medjuck, Bena, *Exodus 34:29–35: Moses' "Horns" in early Bible Translations and Interpretations* (Montréal: McGill University, 1998).

A creature in our image is eating a snake and is thus transformed into a dragon. This old belief is expressed in the *Atalanta Fugiens*:

> *Veteres dixere, quod serpens, qui serpentem devoravit, fiat draco.*[41]
> The ancients said that a serpent who devours another serpent becomes a dragon.

Let us remember that in Exodus 7:8–12 Moses and Aaron are confronted with the Egyptian sorcerers whom tradition has called *Jannes* and *Jambres*, Aaron's rod is transformed into a serpent, as are the sorcerers; but Aaron's snake eats the other two. In this truly magical match, the perfect serpent – whom now we know is a dragon – eats the lesser serpents, even though they share a similar nature. Once again, the pharmakon, the poison that cures.

The brazen serpent is still echoed by the crosier of Orthodox bishops or *Pateritza*, but the purpose of a mystery is not being solved. We would deceive ourselves by chasing the rags of reason. It is challenging us to look beyond and upwards, towards the suprarational. The ancients had understood this.

The Faceless Prophet

THERE is another interesting aspect of Moses' symbolism: the fact that he veiled his face when speaking to the Israelites to cover its radiance, and he unveiled it for speaking with the Lord (Exodus 34:29–33). This has always inevitably reminded us of the shamanistic pattern of covering the eyes at the moments of ecstasy, for a primordial belief in the numinous power of the stare. Thus, we have depicted Moses speaking with his God during the act of unveiling his face.

His God, it should be noted, is also faceless; this is stressed throughout many passages, most famously Exodus 33:20:

> *You cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live.*

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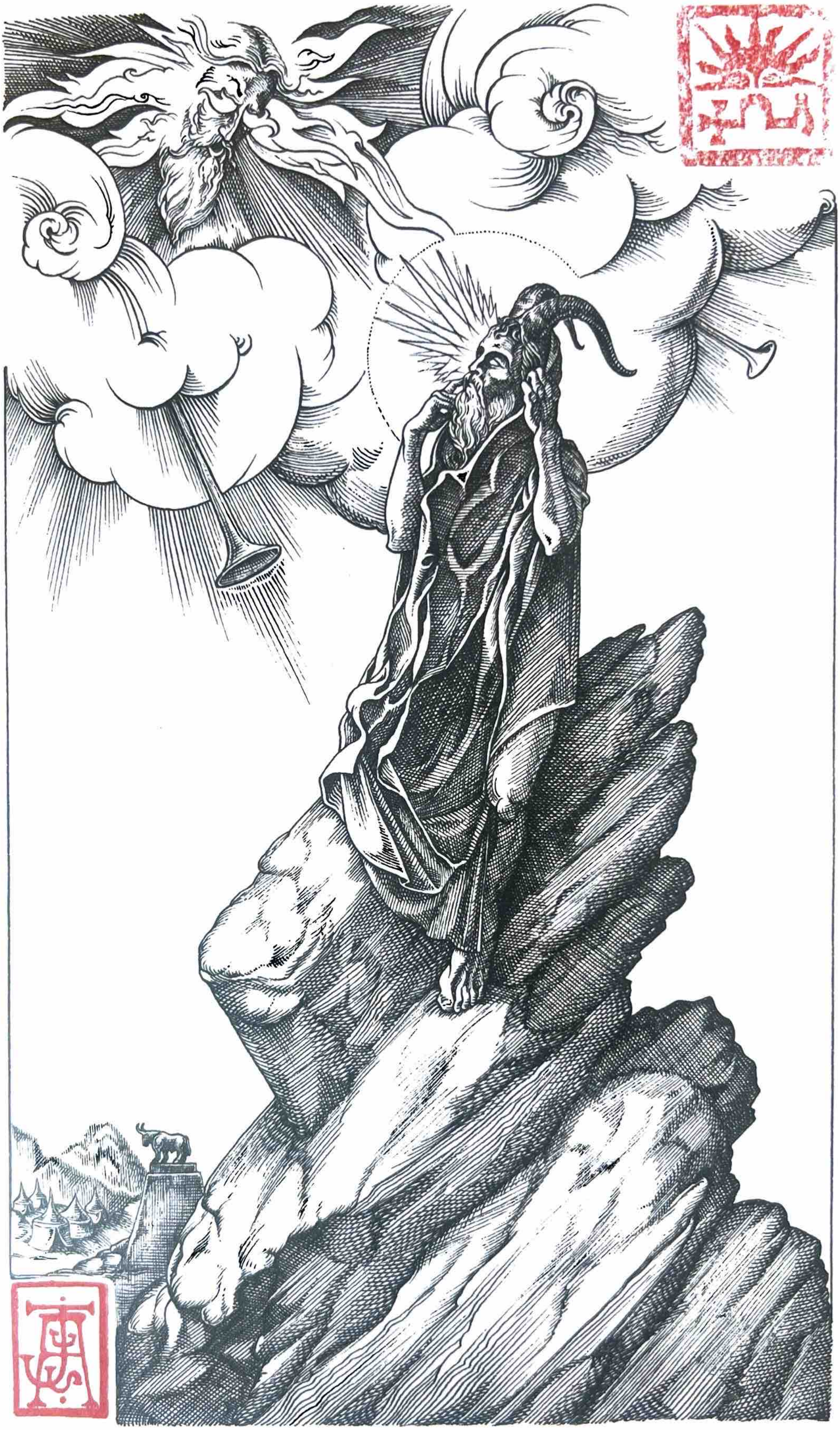
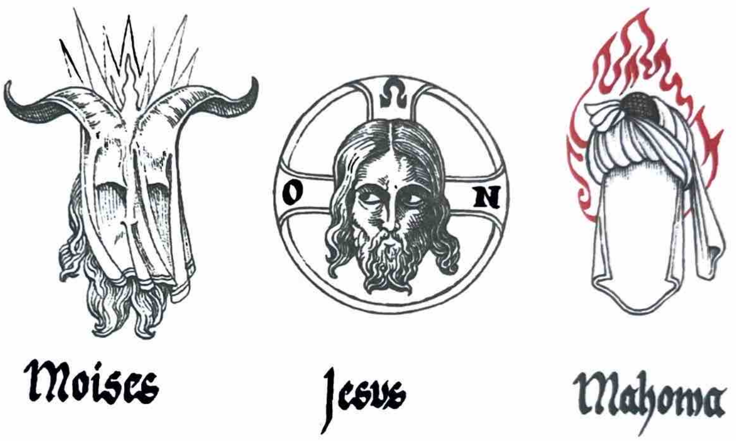
[41] Maier, Michael, *Atalanta Fugiens, hoc est, Emblemata nova de secretis naturae chymica* (Oppenheim: Theodor de Bry, 1618), Discursus XIV, p. 66.



This same idea is repeated in Judges 13:22, Isaiah 6:5, and John 1:18. Interestingly, some images of the Prophet Muhammad, when produced within the Islamic world, adopted the convention of showing his face veiled. Moreover, they also introduced a fascinating flaming halo which sometimes arose from the head, and sometimes surrounded the whole body. Let us then remember that the other defining aspect of the god of Moses is to be found in fire. Christiane Gruber considers that such images are the product of mysticism rather than iconoclasm: *Displacing the veristic mode, pictorial techniques that abstract the prophetic body appear to have emerged at this time much more from the allegorical desire to represent a more "metaphorical Muhammad" than from attempts to prohibit or eradicate his depiction—the latter being only one facet of a distinctively modern phenomenon.*[42]



Both these prophets cover their faces in imitation of a God that remains partly unmanifested. The prophet himself becomes a simulacrum of the deity, a faceless one. In this way, they follow Eckhart's principle of mystical identity, in an aniconic manner. Only the Christ is identified as the revealed image of the Father, and as such, no representations of the Father are to be found in the earliest Christian art, as the semblance of Christ was considered his self-manifestation.[43] Through the incarnation, this mystical identity was granted the face of a man, and this became central for John of Damascus when defending holy icons.

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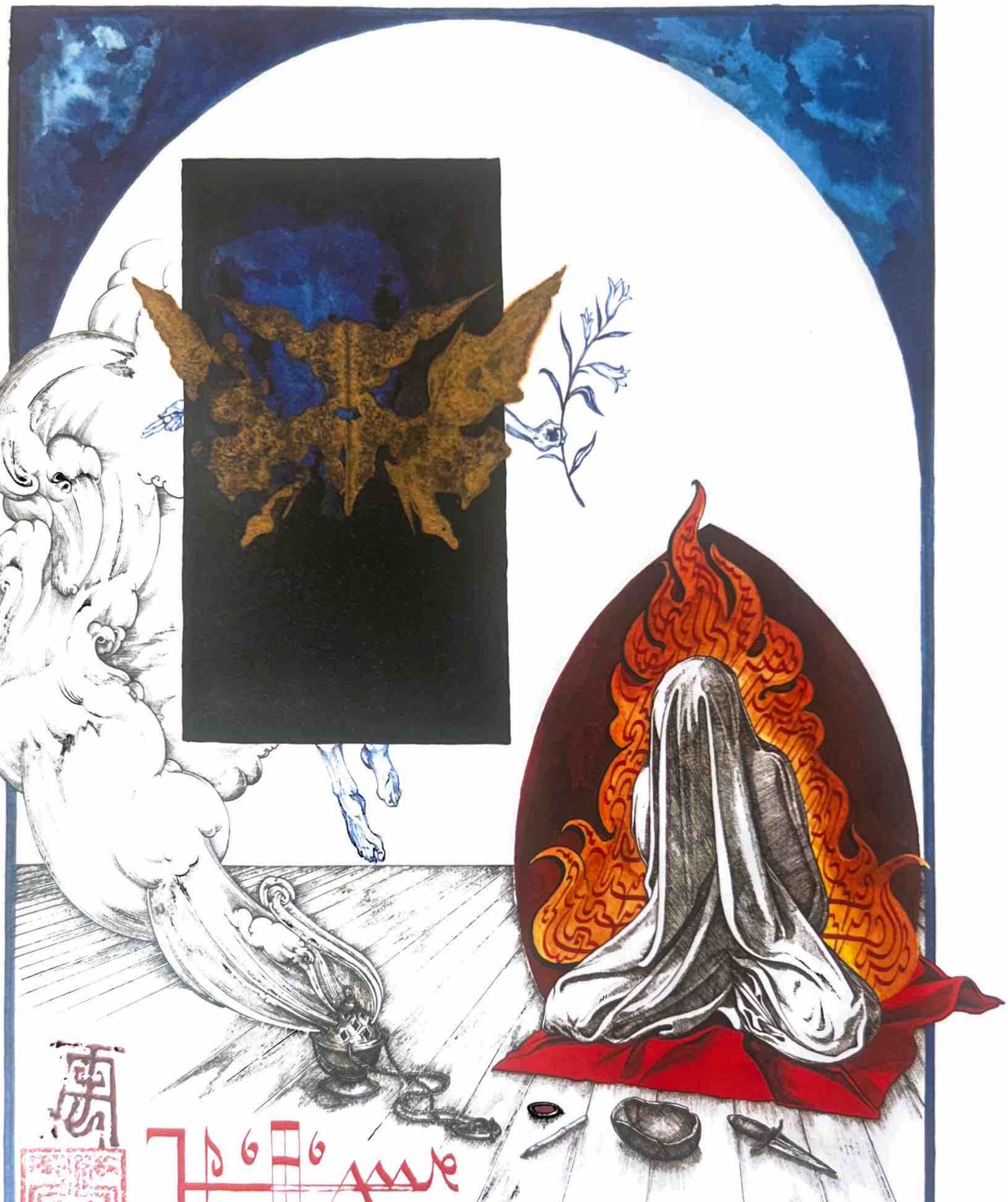
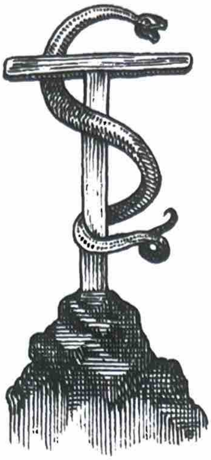
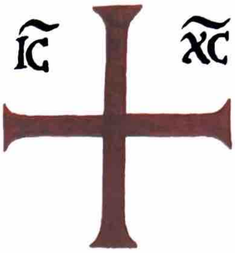
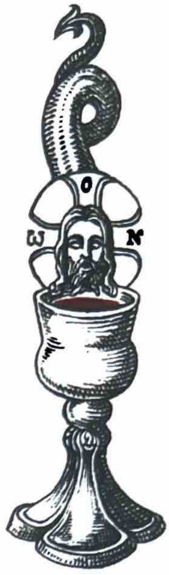
42 Gruber, Christiane, "Between Logos (*Kalima*) and Light (*Nur*): Representations of the Prophet Muhammad in Islamic Painting," *Muqarnas* 26 (2009), pp. 229–262, p. 230.

43 Bœspflug, François, and Zaluska, Yolanta, "Le dogme trinitaire et l'essor de son iconographie en Occident de l'époque carolingienne au IV^{e} Concile du Latran (1215)," *Cahiers de Civilization Médiévale*, 37e année (n 147), Juillet-Septembre 1994, pp. 181–240.









That which man must ascend, was descended by the saviour in the beginning of time. The descent of the serpent is the most important *Urbild*, primordial image of this doctrine. The cross never existed on this Earth; it is the intersection between both worlds, the pole from which the serpent hangs, where two realities converge. This is the true meaning of the chalice of Saint John the Evangelist, where the serpent descended to be transubstantiated into the eucharistic wine, the poison that heals.

"Is it not written in your Law, 'I have said you are gods'?" (John 10:34, Psalms 82:6) Did not the serpent promise this? (Genesis 3:5).

Shesha is the only being that remains awake as *Vishnu* sleeps; in the rabbinical Genesis, Jehovah needs to kill ancient dragons before creating this world.[44] The serpent is that marvellous presence that has not taken conscience or individuation of any kind, therefore her form is so alien to the form of man. She represents a state of dreamless sleep (*Sushupti*); she is the uncreated being, beyond the God and its personalization.

Matthew 24:17 tells us: "For as lightning that comes from the east is visible even in the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man." While in Luke 10:18, Jesus answers: "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven." Just as with the ambivalence of the snakes, here we have the same allegory of lightning standing for both the Messiah and Satan.

We based the following emblem on a stele preserved at the Dreyer museum in Puno (South Perú) belonging to the *Pucará* culture, dated around 500 BC, depicting a horned, crooking snake. These steles, called “stones of lightning” by Teresa Gisbert, are identified by her as depicting the ancient lightning deity *Illapa*, as it was pictured in the altar of *Qoricancha*,[45] like a snake of lightning descending from the sky.

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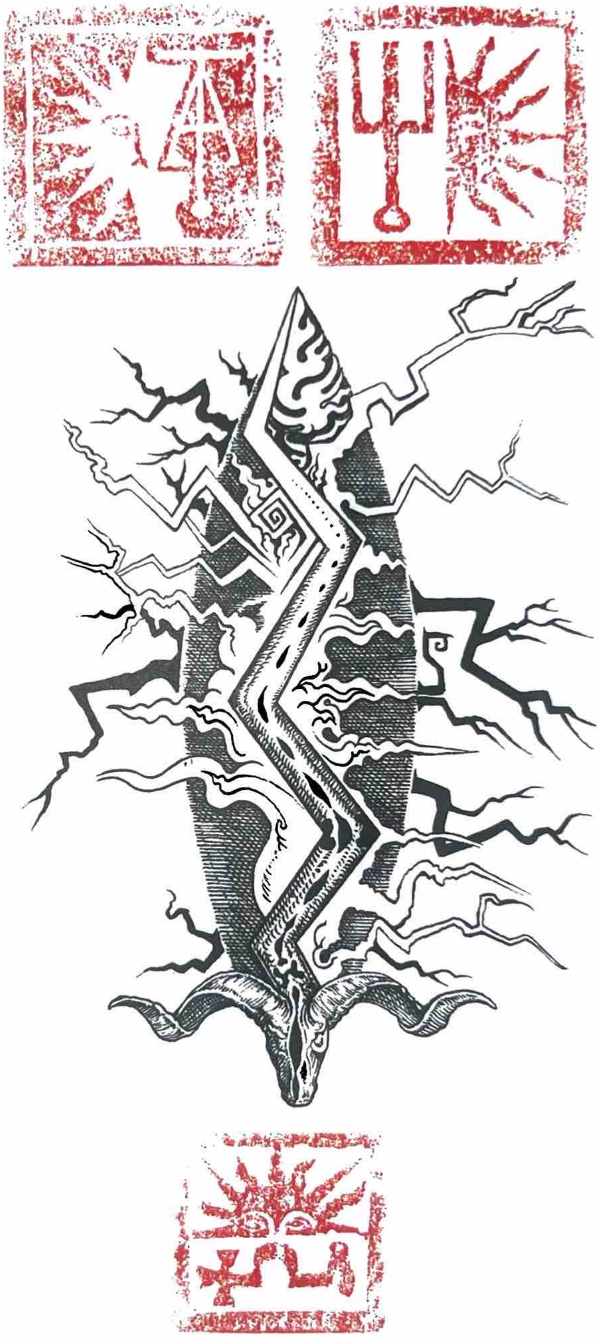
[44] Graves, Robert; Patai, Raphael, *Los Mitos Hebreos* (Madrid: Alianza, 2009), p. 32.



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[45] Gisbert, Teresa, *El Paraíso de los Pájaros Parlantes: La imagen del otro en la cultura andina* (La Paz: Plural, 2012), pp. 76–77.

Perhaps the finest exposition of such a theology is to be found in a treatise attributed to the *Perates*, instead of the material attributed to the *Ophites* or *Naasenes*. Again, the consistency in the identification of such sects by the Church Fathers was dubious at best. For instance, the name of their founder, *Euphrates*, also appears as the heresiarch named by Origen as an Ophite teacher. Portions of this treatise have been preserved in the *Philosophumena* of Hippolytus, and it shows wonderful similarities with the Ophite cosmogony.

Hippolytus dismisses them as astrologers who have simply polluted Christian doctrine with superstitious practices, but at the same time tells us that their contempt for the stars was total. Man was trapped in this debased universe governed by the stars, and only the *Perates*, they claimed, could pass through (from where their name originates) the spheres of the stars and attain liberation.

The treatise begins with an intricate description of the rulers of their spheres, which combines in a highly syncretic manner Greek gods, titans, and heroes, with Egyptian deities and purely Gnostic names. We will not dwell with it in full, but we hope that further attention will be given to this fascinating piece.

After identifying Exodus, the people of Israel leaving Egypt, with the soul leaving the body, and the crossing of the Red Sea with the "waters of corruption," the *Perates* identify the "gods of damnation" as the stars and say that:

> Such gods Moses called "snakes of the desert" (Numbers 21:6), who bite and destroy those who believed to have crossed the Red Sea. However, to the sons of Israel that had been bitten in the wilderness, Moses showed the true serpent, the perfect one, and all who believed in it were not bitten in the desert – that is to say they did not fall under the power of the potencies. For no one has the power to save and liberate those who went out of Egypt – that is to say, this body and this world – except for the perfect serpent, plenitude of plenitudes.[46]

To this they add that the rod that became a serpent and ate the ones of the Egyptian sorcerers represents the same principle. Following this, we find probably the most beautiful excerpts:

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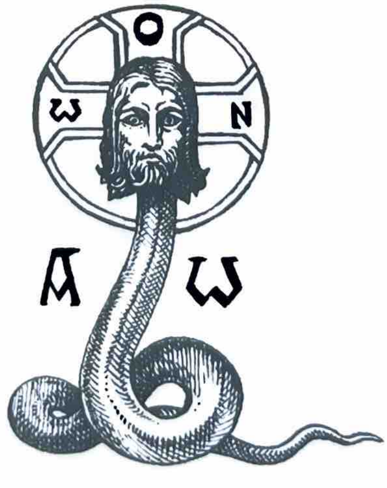
[46] Hippolytus, Philosophumena, Book V, 15:6–7. In: *Los Gnósticos*, Volumen II, introducción, traducción y notas de José Montserrat Torrens (Madrid: Gredos, 1991), pp. 76–77.

> The universal serpent is precisely the wise oracle of Eve. This is the mystery of Eden; this is the river that flows from Paradise; this is the sign with which Cain was marked, so that anyone who finds him could not kill him. Cain is him whose offering was not accepted by the god of this world, whom, instead, took the bloody sacrifice of Abel, because the lord of this world delights in blood.
>
> This serpent is the one whom, in the latter days, in the times of Herod, has appeared under the shape of a man.[47]

We cannot stress the importance of these verses enough. The whole exegesis is perfectly expressed within them – and most importantly, they include this unique metamorphosis of the saviour, *the serpent that has appeared under the shape of a man*. Following this, they come back to the symbolism of the brazen serpent and compare it, of course, with the excerpt in John 3:14. To finalize, they add that one who has blessed eyes should simply look up to the night sky to confirm this sacred principle, and he shall behold the great serpent that is the beginning of heaven, outside of whom nothing exists. This is the "great sign" visible for those who can see, and regarding this they quote from Aratus' *Phenomena* V:46, the ancient astronomical poem, and identify this with the constellation of Draco. This constellation is surrounded by a crown and a lyre, on top of it there is a kneeling man, and around it, there are smaller, "imperfect" serpents, like the constellation of Ophiuchus.

The perfect serpent, then, is a dragon.



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[47] Ibid., Book V,15:9–10.

King summarizes all the aspects we have discussed so far in the following way:

> The grand doctrine of Gnosticism was this: The soul on being released from the body (its prison-house and place of torment) has to pass through the regions of the Seven Powers; which it cannot do unless impregnated beforehand with knowledge: otherwise it is seized upon and swallowed by the dragon-formed Ruler of this world, *Satan Ophiomorphos*, and voided forth through his tail upon earth again, where it animates a swine or some such beast, and repeats its career once more. But should it be filled with knowledge, it eludes the Seven Powers, and tramples upon the head of Sabaoth ("of whom they say he hath the hair of a woman") and mounts up unto the eighth heaven, the abode of *Barbelo*, the Universal Mother, and who according to the Pistis-Sophia is the celestial Mother of the Saviour.[48]

Another prefiguration in the Old Testament which we have chosen by our own initiative is the rarely depicted story of Nadab and Abihu. As a prefiguration for sudden enlightenment, for ritual discipline and transgression, for the attainment of direct knowledge.

Nadab and Abihu were the two oldest sons of Aaron. Their story is told in Leviticus 10:

> Aaron's sons Nadab and Abihu took their censers, put fire in them and added incense; and they offered unauthorized fire before the Lord, contrary to his command. So fire came out from the presence of the Lord and consumed them, and they died before the Lord. Moses then said to Aaron, "This is what the Lord spoke of when he said:
>
> 'Among those who approach me I will be proved holy; in the sight of all the people I will be honoured.'"
>
> Aaron remained silent.

Later, Aaron is forbidden to mourn his sons or perform any ritual related to their burial.

There are two possible, radically different interpretations for this story. One is that they had committed the ultimate sin, that blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, which cannot be forgiven (Mark 3:29); their unauthorized fire was a direct attack against the jealous god, exposing his nature as a demiurge, and he could not let them live.

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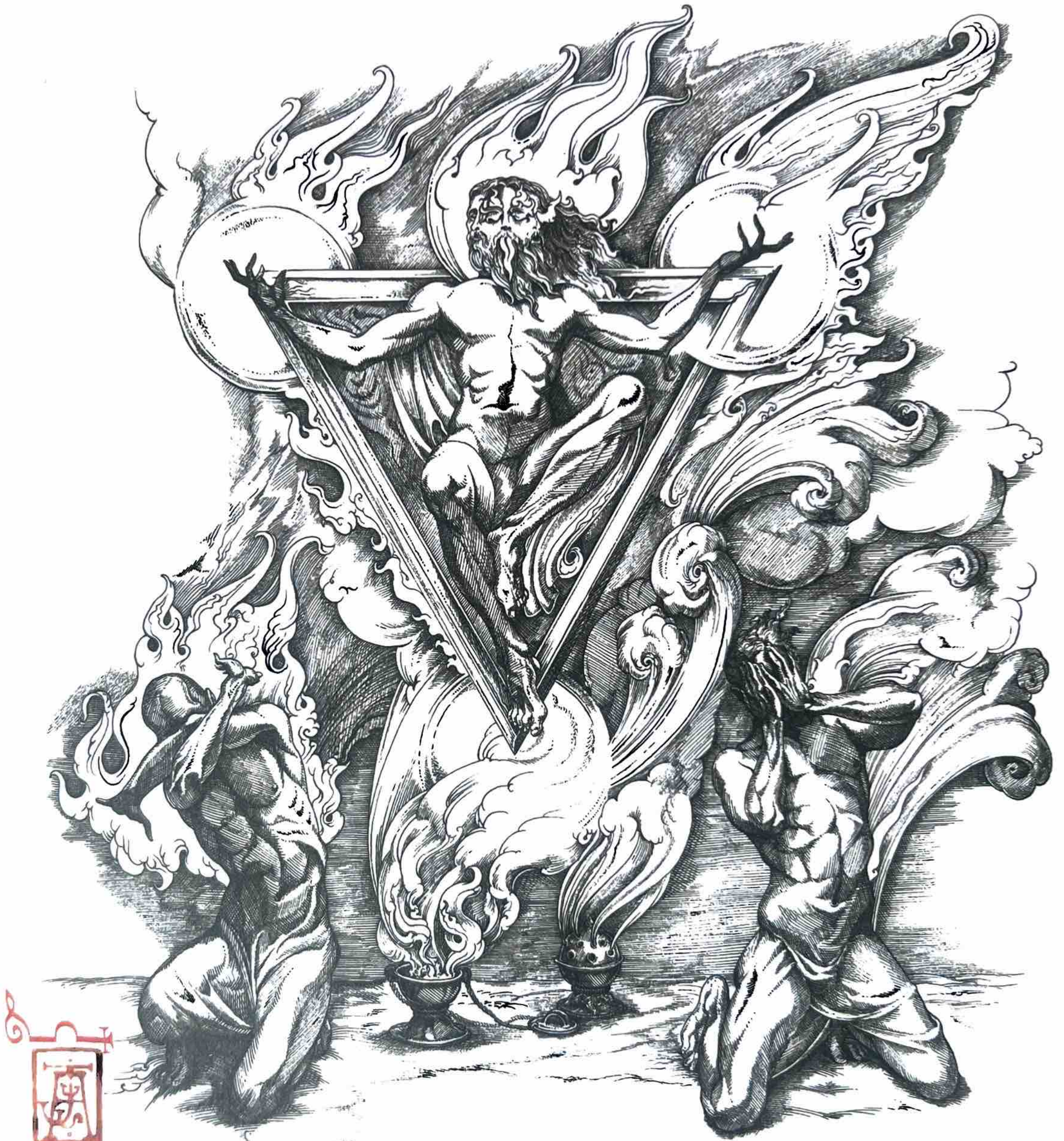
[48] King, C. W., *The Gnostics and their Remains: Ancient and Mediaeval* (London: David Nutt, 1887), p. 333.

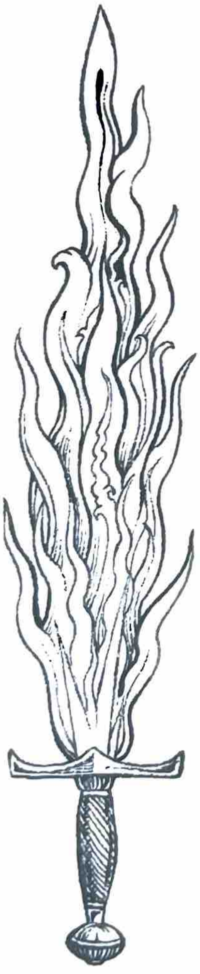
The other is that they attained perfect knowledge of the transcendental godhead, and thus, like Elijah and Enoch, ascended in fire. Did he not say that no man shall see him and live? And they did so through unauthorized, secret means.



This story is usually interpreted as the punishment for the breaking of priestly rules, in the immediate presence of God. It is understood that they lit their own fires, instead of taking from the already burning sacred incense to kindle them. Thus, their fire was foreign or unholy. They blurred the distinction between sacred and profane – perhaps we could understand this strange fire as their own spirits, being too daring?

What was the rite of Nadab and Abihu?

God knows.



One night can reveal more than many lifetimes. Angels reveal to men only that which men do not know. Just as fish in the abyssal zones of the sea ignore the light of the sun, so do men ignore the realm of the sacred. This will never irrupt their lives in any natural way, but when it does, it never leaves. There is an infinite fire burning at the end of the universe. This sword is the limit of all that is knowable.

There are eternal images imprinted in the soul. They belong to no time; they live outside time and belong to no man. Therefore, they manifest whenever and wherever they want.

We can only understand the unknown in analogy to that which we already know. This is why those unfamiliar to the language of the sacred seem to have no eyes – they seem blind and cannot even perceive the presence of the transcendent. This is also why such images inevitably take the shape of men. Our understanding would collapse if we tried to perceive them as they really are. Remember Arjuna's terror when beholding the *Virat Rupa*. Man is the measurement of all things, indeed, but because he can only understand the worldly and otherworldly in analogy to his own figure. Some see animals, some see men, some see fire. The vision is perhaps one and the same, but the distinction is a naïve one. Who are we to say that somewhere god is not? Therefore, the battle for Monotheism will always be lost. There can be no contradiction within ultimate truth, but in failing to perceive this, we need the figures and symbols seen by the prophets. This is how sacred language originates.

This transcendental shape beyond man was revealed at moment of Transfiguration, within *taboric* light. In this regard, Western painters have been remarkably shy, and no version has surpassed that of Theophanes the Greek, where the glorious body stands within fascinating geometrical refractions of light. In our rendering, Elijah, and Moses who appeared at his side, are surprised by his presence, and the male apostles are not even aware of such light; they are stuck discussing the authority of their respective gospels. According to Francisco García Bazán, most of the revelations given to the Gnostics were imparted by the "photophany" of the resurrected Christ, as a body of light.[49] As such, he is shown revealing himself to Mary Magdalene.

As forementioned, the crucifixion took no place in Gnostic narratives. Yet during the Middle Ages, the mystical contemplation of the elements of the Passion would develop a complex symbolic language which makes us question ourselves on how much of it was understood historically – and how much of this mystical blood went beyond what any modern man may understand. Such is the case with iconographies as the "man of sorrows" in the medieval West, or the *Analavos* of the *Hieroschema* in the East. Certainly, for Meister Eckhart, the birth as well as the Passion had to take place within the soul, and the historicity was otherwise meaningless.

We have previously introduced the notion of a seal, an imprint, left by the Aeon, through his presence, and granted during initiation. There is a strange echo of this notion in the relic known as the Veronica, and in general, in those relics of cloth and blood which seem to be the consequence of a transcendental body emanating light and leaving eternal imprints on matter. This matter, however, is but a footprint; different than other relics, it can still indicate the absence of the sacred persona. Just as with the mark of a seal, where the seal is no longer present.

The legend of the Veronica comes from the Apocryphal gospel of Nicodemus VII.1, where a woman called Berenice testifies in favour of Christ, saying that she was cured from a "blood flow" that had lasted 12 years. This, however, had little to do with the traditional narrative about the relic, where the cloth is imprinted with Christ's face on his way to the calvary. As such, the Roman Catholic Church tried to forbid this devotion, failing miserably.[50]

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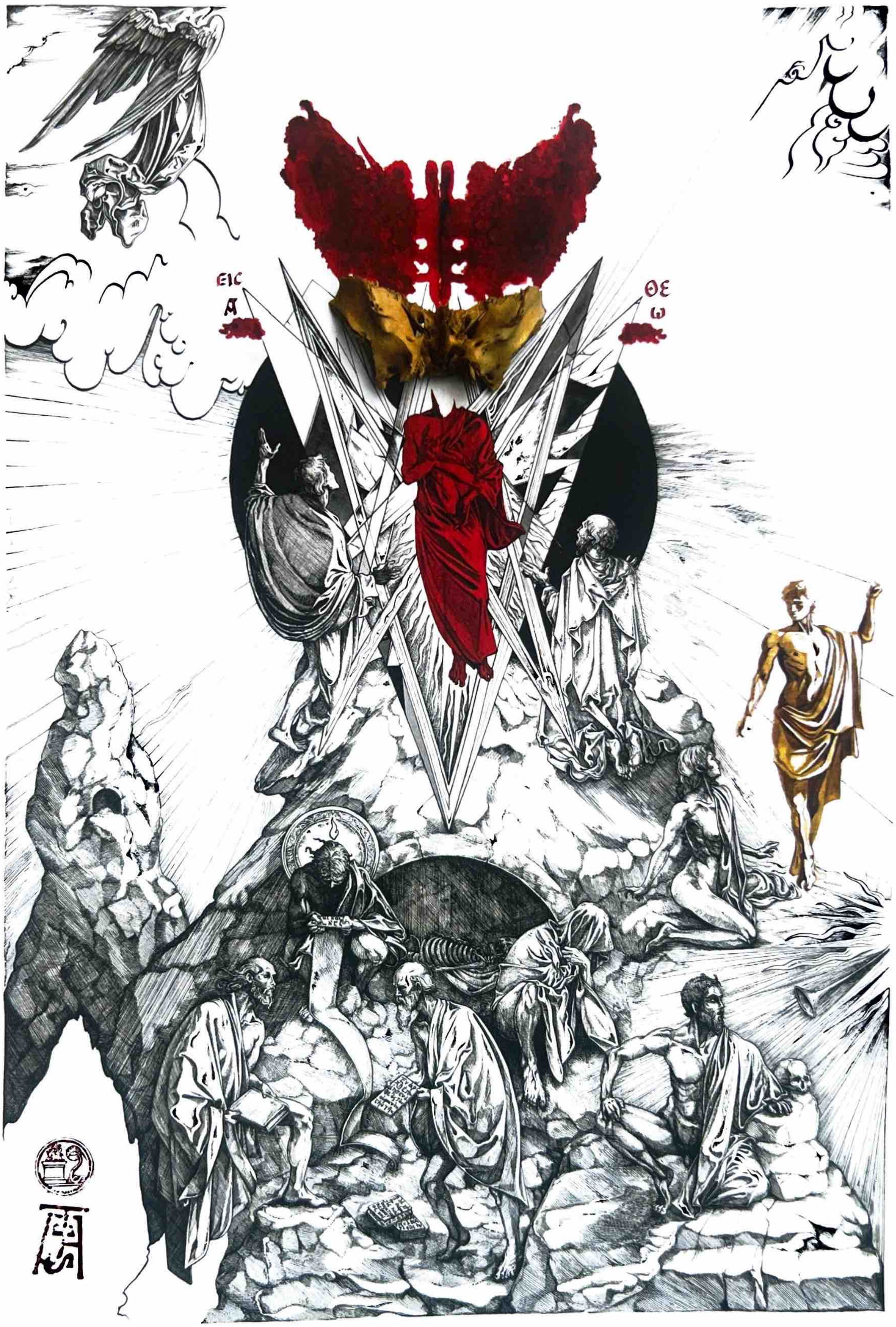
[49] García Bazán, Francisco *La Biblioteca Gnóstica De Nag Hammadi Y Los Orígenes Cristianos* (Buenos Aires: El hilo de Ariadna, 2015).

[50] Jaquero, Alejandro, *El Control de la Religiosidad Popular a través de los Tratados Pictóricos en el Siglo de Oro. Los casos de las imágenes de San Cristóbal y la Verónica* (Toledo: Universidad de Castilla-La Mancha, 2016).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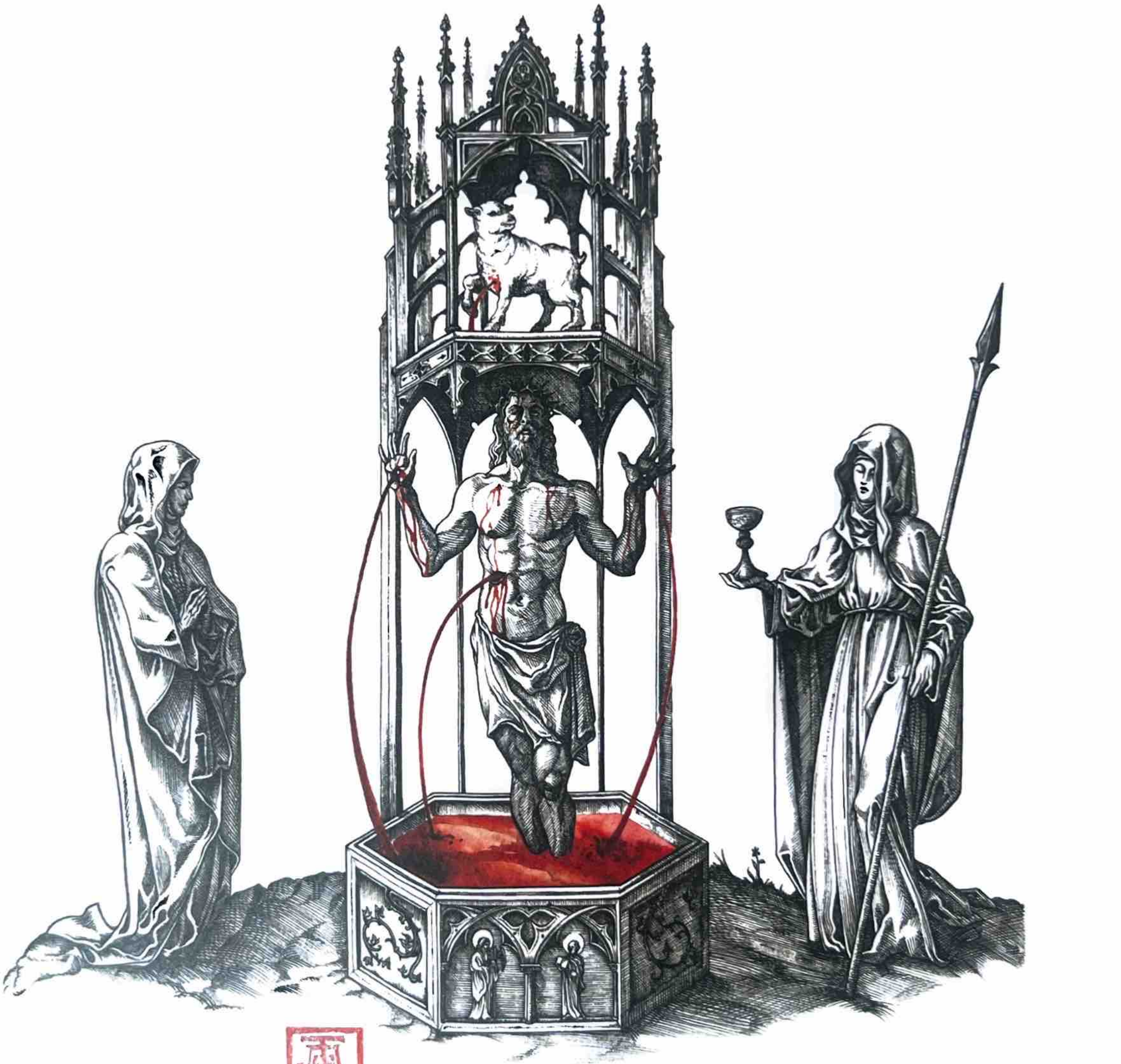

Another relic, with another story, arose in the East: the *Mandylion*, the origin of which rests in apocryphal correspondence between Jesus and the king Abgar of Edessa. Christ would have sent him a cloth imprinted with his face to cure him from his illness. Abgar is praised for believing in Christ without having seen him.[51] This byzantine relic would be a face imprinted on cloth, but depicting a fully living Jesus, believed to be in many cases the model for his icons.

The most thorough study that we know of regarding these blood relics and how they were slowly displaced by modernity, in favour of the Turin shroud, has been done by Felipe Pereda.[52] Interesting depictions of the Veronica featuring three faces arose in the XVII century. In the case of a painting by Felipe Gil de Mena from 1650,[53] three identical faces of Christ, crowned with thorns, are depicted horizontally. In an anonymous XVIII century painting from Ayacucho[54] depicting the Via Crucis, the cloth of Veronica displays three faces vertically. This would have originated in the legends told by a pilgrim to the holy land called Diego de Mérida in 1512, who tells that the cloth would have been folded four times (*Tetradiplon*), thus giving three imprints of Christ's face. However, Pereda argues that the need for this legend arose given the existence of three different relics of the Veronica held at different places.[55]

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[51] *Apócrifos del Antiguo y del Nuevo Testamento*, Introducción, selección y notas de Antonio Piñero (Madrid: Alianza, 2010), pp. 439–440.

[52] Pereda, Felipe, *Crimen e ilusión: el arte de la verdad en el siglo de oro* (Madrid: Marcial Pons, 2017).

[53] Currently in the Museo Diocesano y Catedralicio de Valladolid.

[54] Currently in the Iglesia de la Virgen del Pilar, Lima.

[55] The *Santa Faz de Alicante*, and the *Santa Faz de Jaén*, both in Spain, and the Vatican Veronica. It is interesting to note that none of these remotely resemble a real human face in their proportions. Such was the case in late medieval depictions of the relic, where the holy face was disproportionately larger than the woman holding the veil. Equally so in the engraving by Martin Schongauer from 1480 in which we have based our depiction of the Veronica displaying three faces vertically. This was, in our opinion, the visual outcome of a fully hieratic worldview which affected even their cognition of human proportions. The sacred had to be larger than the profane.

An even rarer case is the veil of Veronica depicting a three-faced Trinity crowned with thorns. Of this, we know of three Mexican exemplars[56] and a Spanish one.[57]

Most of viceregal art was closely based on European models using engraved sources. However, for the images of the Veronica displaying the faces vertically, or a three-faced Trinity, no engraving has been identified as its vehicle so far. Our current work, then, is a way of imagining missing links.

Any trinitary interpretation of this image would be highly problematic, as it implies that Christ would have never found himself "abandoned" by the Father, and that they were always one, even in passion and death. This could constitute *Patripassianism*, an aspect of Sabellianism, one of the earliest heresies to be condemned by the Churches of both East and West. It would also imply that his true nature would have been revealed on the cloth, effectively transfigured, and as such, the imprint would tell us more about the being than the being himself. Or is it that what we are seeing is the Veronica transfigured by the eyes of the pious, mystical beholder, to whom the hierophany has already taken place, as he knows the inner nature of what is beheld?

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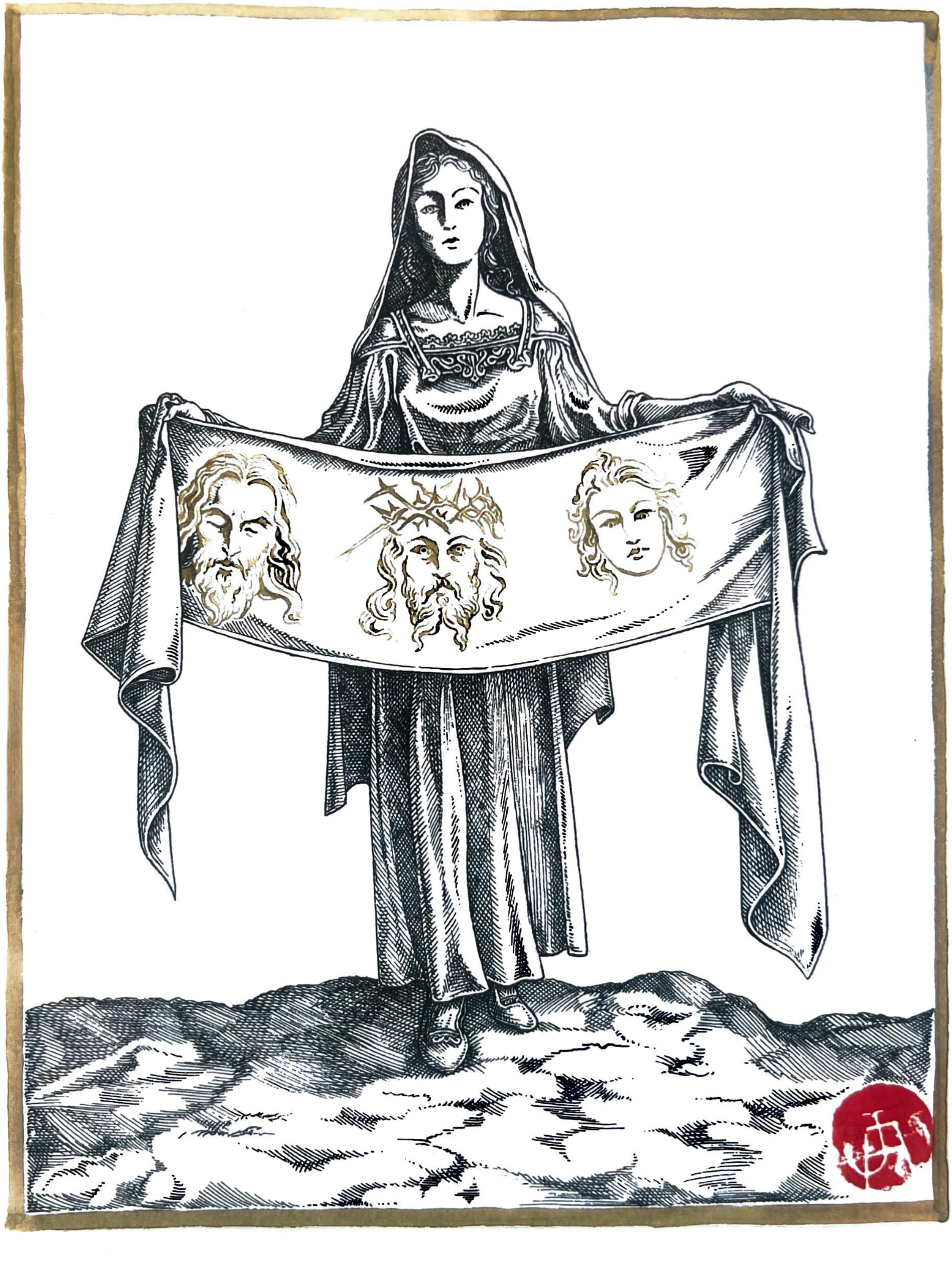
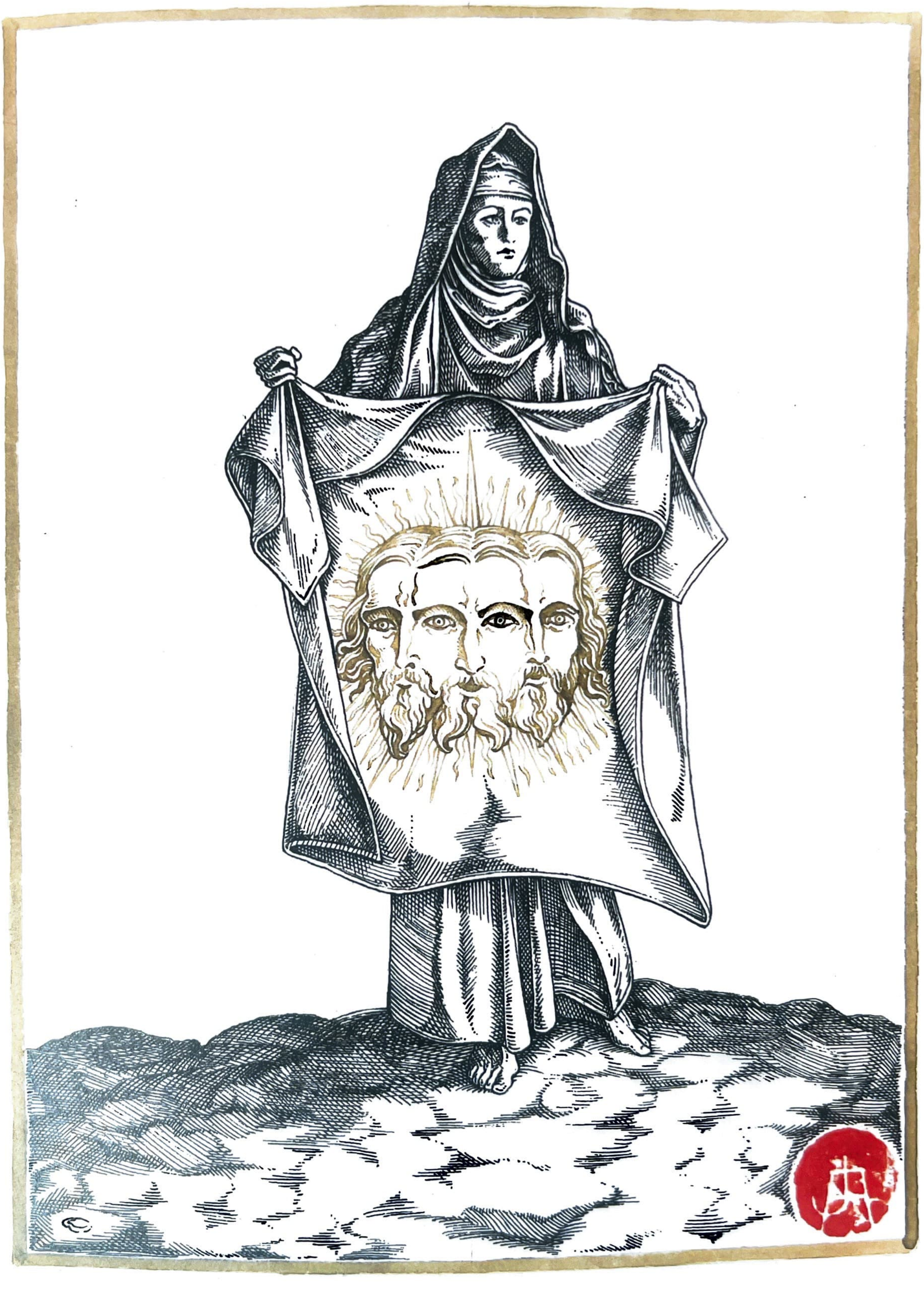
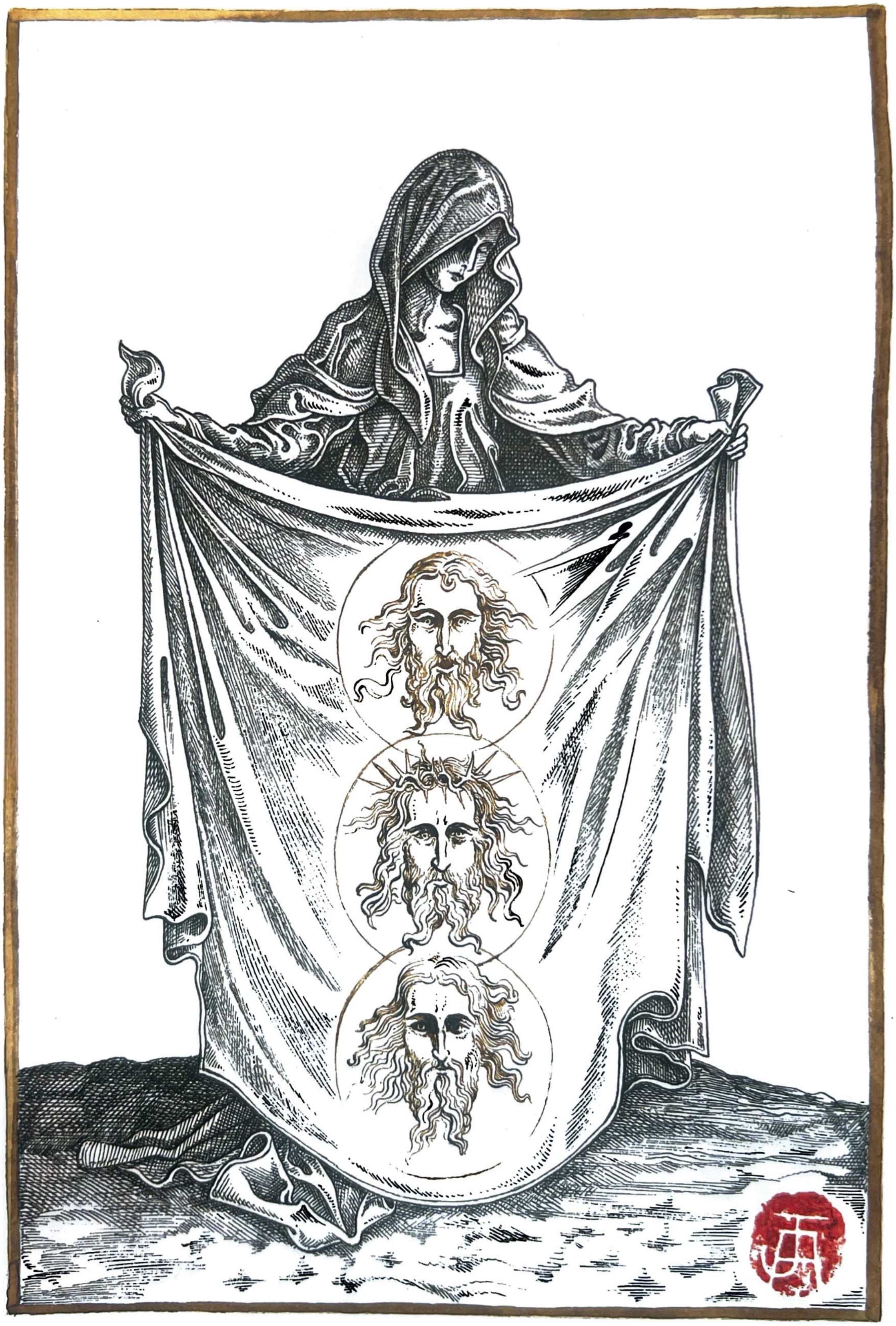
[56] They are all anonymous paintings from the XVII century, one at the *Museo del Virreinato* in Tepotzotlan, another at the Cathedral of Mexico City, and the last one at *San Juan de Tilapa*. The largest study on the Mexican exemplars that we know of so far is: Maquivar, María del Consuelo *De lo permitido a lo prohibido: Iconografía de la Santísima Trinidad en la Nueva España* (México DF: Miguel Ángel Porrúa/INAH, 2006).

[57] Anonymous Spanish painter from the XVII century, at the church of the *Monasterio de Santa María la Real de Nieva*, Segovia.







Christ in Hell

THE following triptych explores the narration of Christ's descent into Hell, according to the Gospel of Nicodemus.

Stylistically, the aim has been to achieve the sensation of a floating world, purposefully seeking to create unique mannerisms in several figures; it attempts to draw without restrictions of space or gravity. This follows the descriptions of *Tartarus* or *Gehenna* as a bottomless pit.

The apocryphal Gospel of Nicodemus narrates how "At the hour of midnight it dawned in those dark places as the bright light of the sun," which is perfectly inverse to the prophecy of Amos: "And it shall come to pass in that day, saith the Lord God, that I will cause the sun to go down at noon, and I will darken the earth in the clear day" (Amos 8:9). This was interpreted as a prefiguration of Christ's death, when the Earth is covered in darkness. This solar symbolism of the messianic figure is explored through three seals that were carved for marking this work, which indicate, from left to right: dusk (the prophets and the mouth of Hell), midnight (the devil), and dawn (the descent of Christ).

The presence of the prophets that intervene is a particularity of this apocryphal Gospel, as it narrates how in Hell were to be found "all men who had died since the beginning of the world" including pagans, but also righteous men and even prophets - an aspect that could generate a complex soteriological debate. And so, we took the chance of including the Inka who, according to several colonial chronicles (among them Garcilaso de la Vega), would have been a Christian without knowing it.

The inclusion of the prophets in Hell, however, could point towards the fact certain Gnostics rejected the Old Testament altogether, or that they considered all previous prophets as unenlightened, if it were not for the fact that this Gospel shows how the coming of Christ corroborates what they had prophesized in ancient times. Adam, the first man, is shown along with his own skull and bones as the first man to experience death. The prophet Isaiah says: "The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light" (Isaiah 9:1–2). John the Baptist corroborates this by stating: "Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). King David plays his harp, in whose Psalms Christianity also saw the coming of Christ prophesized, along with the *Sibylline Oracles*. And so, elements of both Judaic and Hellenic antiquity were picked and reinterpreted in order to fit this notion of history as Revelation. This aspect is emphasized by the way in which John the Baptist has been depicted as the "angel of the desert" - an iconography from Eastern Christianity, in which he is shown winged and holding his own severed head. The Greek term "angelos" (as meaning "messenger") is literally interpreted as John being the first one to recognize the Messiah; he is therefore "angelized." The severed head is an aspect of what could be called "eschatological perspective," meaning that icons were seen from the perspective of the end of times, and so, all moments of a life would be depicted at once, as viewed from eternity.

Lucifer is depicted in full detail as described by Dante (*Inferno*, Canto: XXXIV) as three-faced, six-winged, devouring Judas, Cassius, and Brutus. As he is the centre, the axis of the material world, there is no gravity in the lower part of his body, from which Dante and Virgil climbed towards the mountain of Purgatory. Popes and Kings were depicted in the very mouth of Hell during the Middle Ages and, contrary to what the modern spectator might assume, this did not imply a transgression to the political order. In fact, such a relativization of earthly powers was often included in the genre known as "Vanitas" and, if anything, it helped normalizing the status quo, as all power could be seen as temporary. Kirfel[58] quotes another version of the Gospel of Nicodemus where Christ, as he defeats and chastises the devil, calls him "three headed Beelzebub" (from the Greek: τρικέφαλε Βεελςεβούλ). This is what led us to depict the devil as described by Dante.

But why did Christ descend to Hell during the day in which he was dead? Redeeming the ancients seems to be the answer of the Apocryphal Gospel. If this is so, why were they without a fair judgement? Were they not righteous men? Or is it perhaps that the Gnostic interpretation comes into play after all, and their sin was not of a moral kind, but ignorance from a Revelation that they could not have achieved before? The light of the sun, then, would play a double symbolism in this narrative, as the light of knowledge - but how could this be consistent with the history of salvation as preconceived by a just God? How could the later notion of Purgatory be developed if so? Perhaps the impossibility of answering such questions is what led this to be an apocryphal piece, that could not fit any consistent doctrine of salvation. Therefore, the descent into Hell remains as a mystery - albeit a fascinating one.

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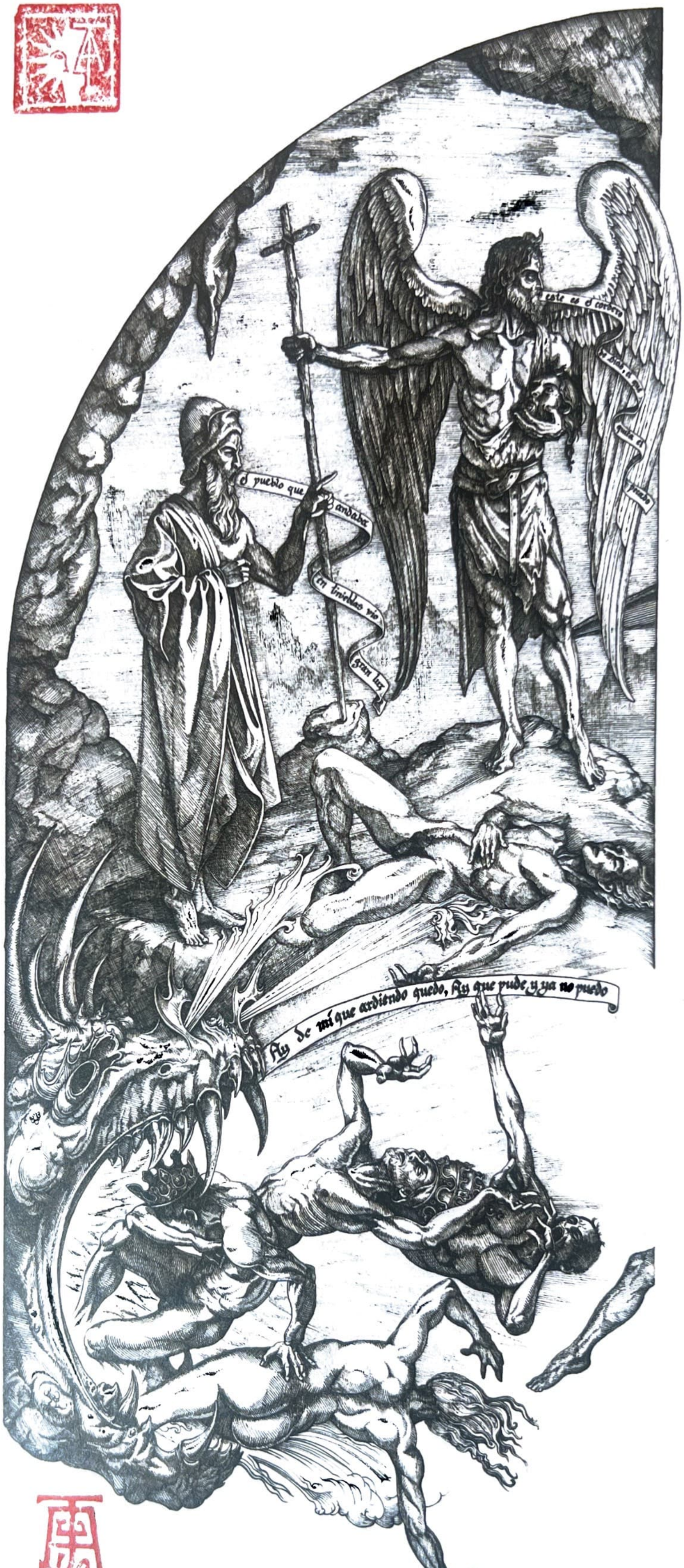
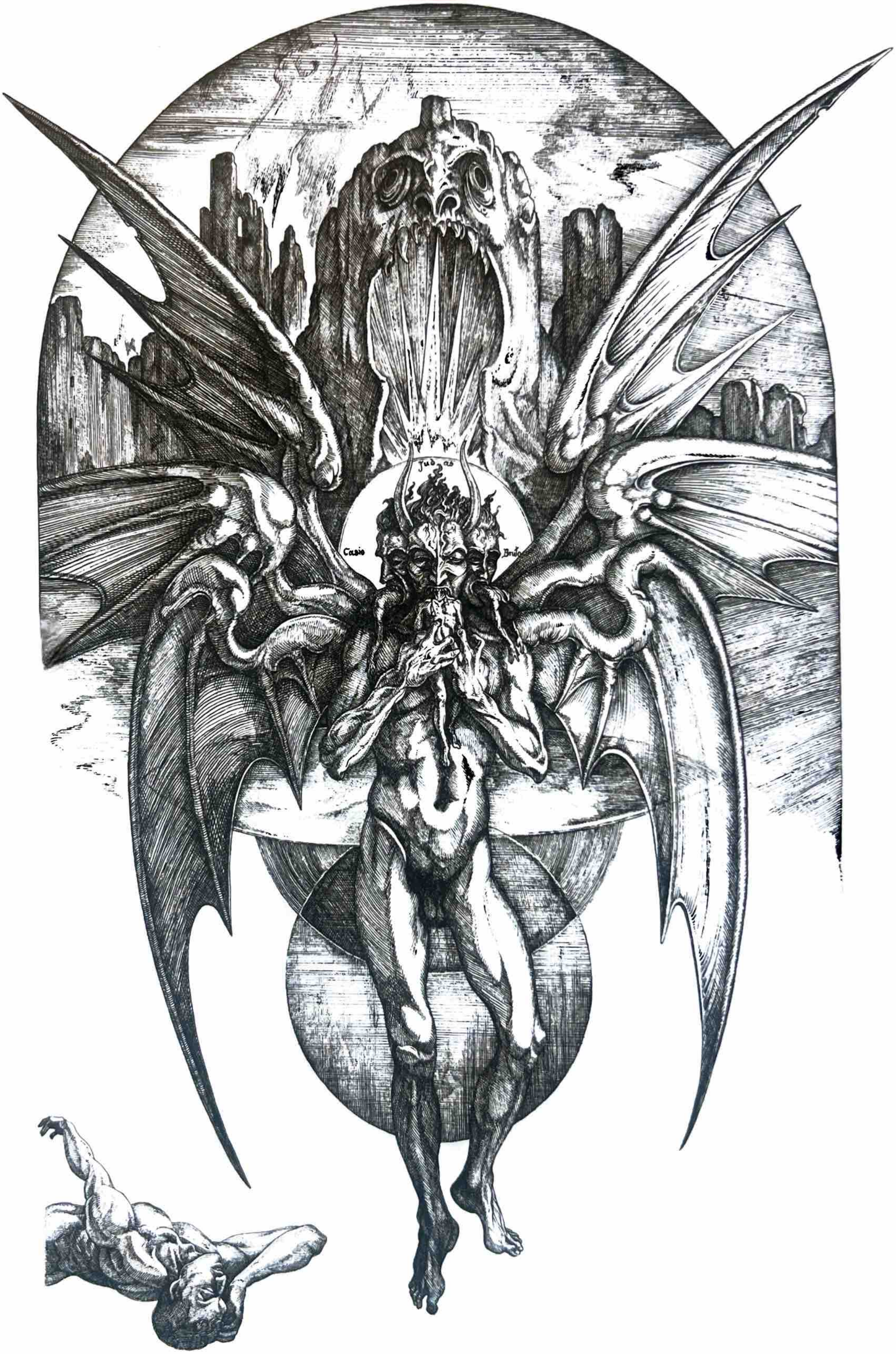
[58] Kirfel, Willibald, *Die dreiköpfige Gottheit: Archäologisch-ethnologischer Streifzug durch die Ikonographie der Religionen* (Bonn: Ferdinand Dümmlers Verlag, 1948), p. 161.


el pueblo que andaba en tinieblas vio gran luz
este es el cordero de Dios, el que quita el pecado
Ay de mí que ardiendo quedo, Ay que pude y ya no puedo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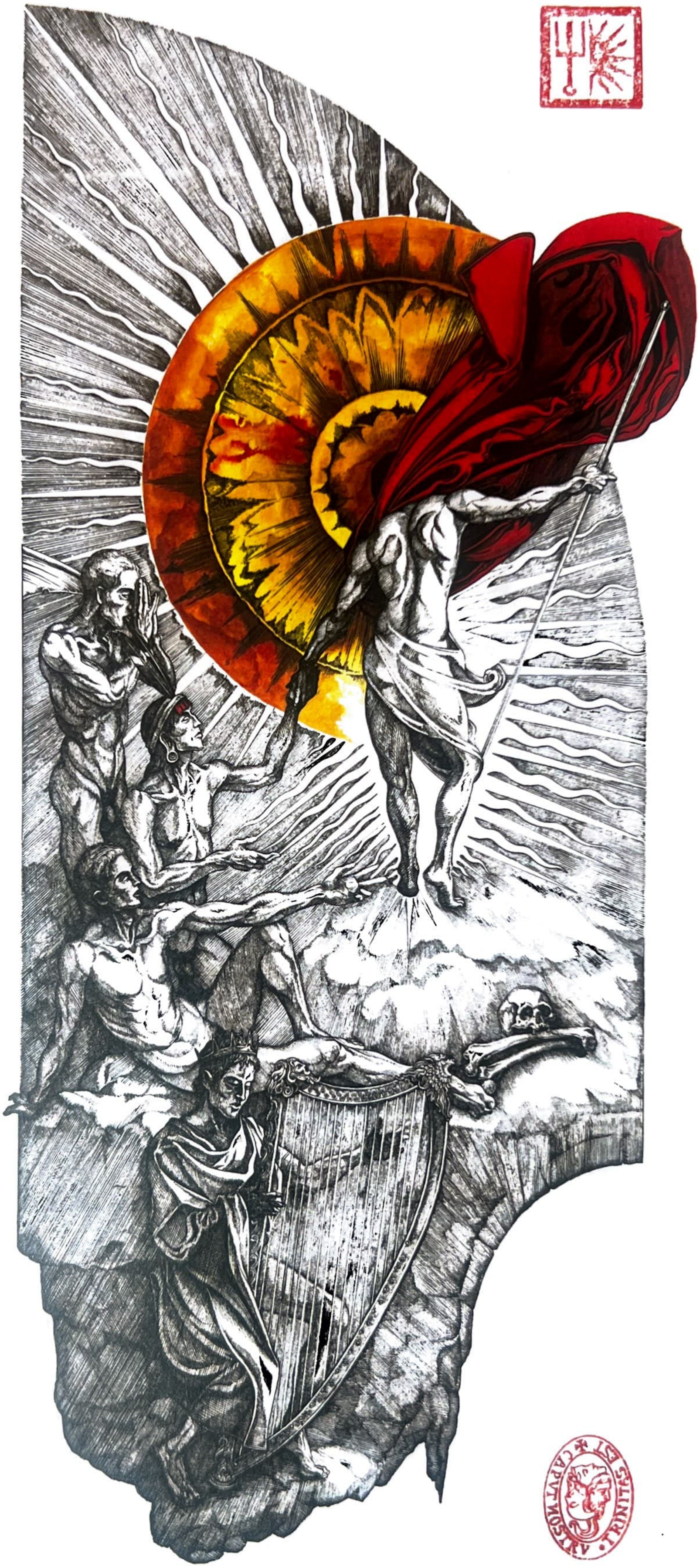

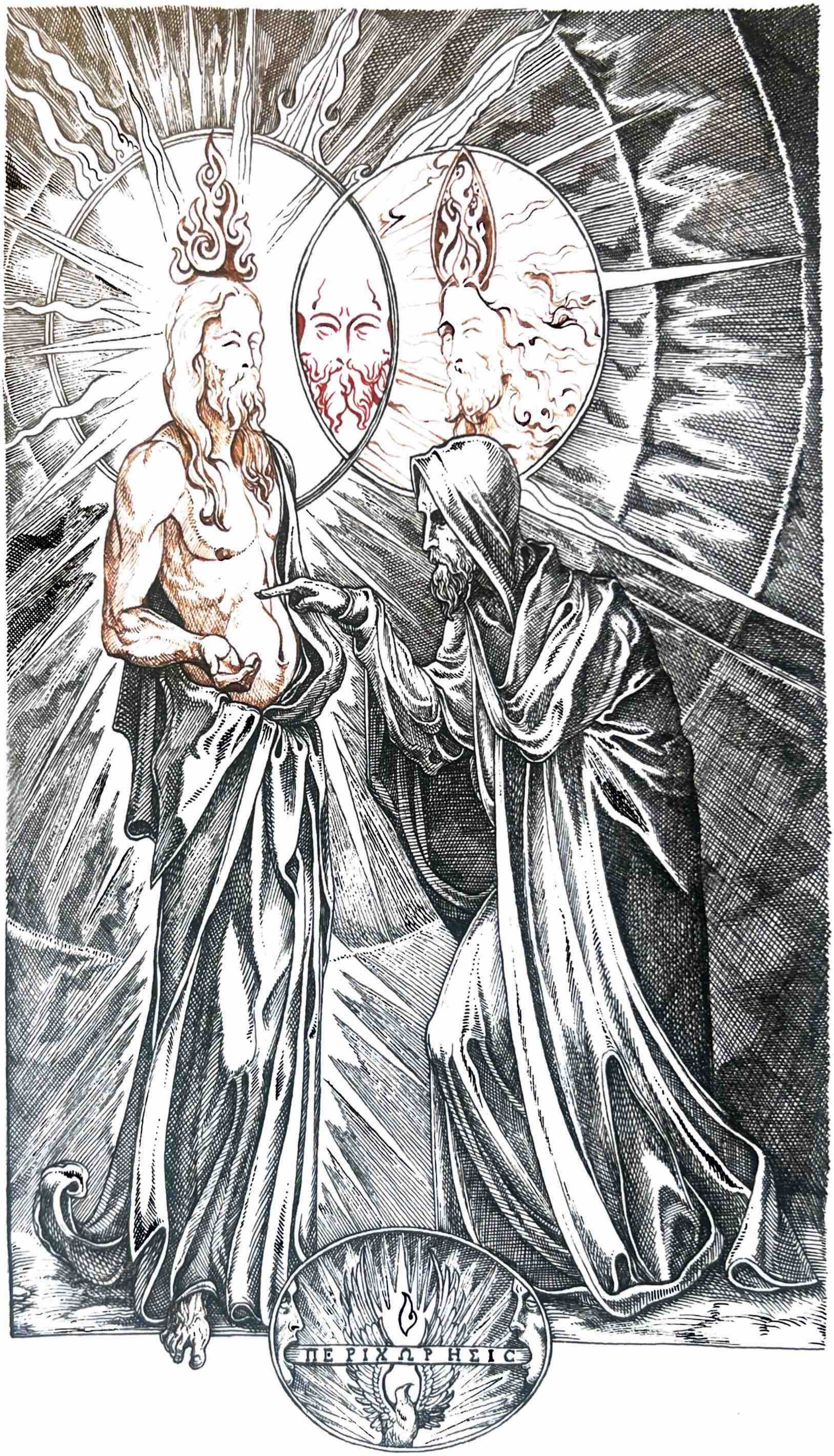
ΠΕΡΙΧΩΡΗΣΙC

The Doubt of Thomas

THOMAS saw the body of light, the resurrected photophany, and yet he doubted. This happens because the divine is not evident; it requires the appropriate discernment. Moreover, doubt prevents him from being gullible. It is not the medieval *fides*; it is not seeing the image without seeing the prototype, in which King Abgar believed. It is touching the prototype itself. This image is refracted in the sacred mirror, in which images are truer than the bodies they reflect. He is pure sun.

It is a sacred doubt opposed to mere obedience without deep understanding and direct experience. This body of light is at the same time his divine twin. With him, he must seek for union. This is achieved through knowledge, not belief. It is a voluntary assertion of one who is determined to believe, but as such he must know first.

Within the body of light, the *Perichoresis* takes place, the inner conversation that is the highest mystery. In order to achieve this, duality must be abolished; the twin must recognize his nature and be transfigured. The beholder becomes what he beholds.[59] A man cannot venerate a deity unless he is a deity himself.[60]

The robe as an allegory for the body can be found in the Pistis Sophia, but it is also given in the Bhagavad Gita to speak about reincarnation. Therefore, Thomas is covered in heavy robes, while his divine twin has already revealed his nature while still walking on the earth. There is no wound, as within the Gnostic narrative there was no passion, no death, but an Anabasis, a Catabasis and an Anastasis. There is no wound.

The doctrine of the syzygy or divine twin was present in Manichaeism and Sabellianism, being both currents condemned by the early Church; as such, often unjustly and misleadingly, it is confused with Gnosticism.

> "...there is a relationship between the early Mani and his representative in heaven, his alter ego, his divine "Twin" who guides and protects him. So also every devout person has his 'Form of

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[59] See Blake, William, *Jerusalem*, p. 66.

[60] See *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, 1.4,10. In: *Doctrinas Secretas de la India: Upanishads*, Introducción, selección, traducción directa del sánskrito y notas de Fernando Tola (Barcelona: Barral, 1973), p. 51.

> Light' in heaven, which finally appears to him, clearly visible, at the moment of death."[61]

There is no death involved in the Gnostic body of light as much as we can tell. The crucifixion was but that laughing mystery described in the Secret Book of John. The second epistle to Timothy seems to be speaking about the Gnostics when he speaks of false teachers "who have departed from the truth. They say that the resurrection has already taken place" (2 Timothy 2:18). Consequently, we find it in the Gospel of Philip, where resurrection is equated with Baptism, taking us back to the Brahminical notion of "*Dvija*" as a second birth.

Those who say that they will die first and resurrect later are mistaken. If they do not receive resurrection first as they live, when they die, they shall receive nothing.[62]

This idea of initiation as the only spark of authentic life must be tied to the obscure Gnostic worldview in which the uninitiated are symbolically asleep or even dead; for this reason, the Gospel of Thomas even says that one is to regard them as beasts.[63]

It is by our own initiative that we compare this glorious body with the *Akephalos*, that *headless Daimon with his sight in his feet*, from the Greek Magical Papyri. He is the ineffable solar man, *whom no man has seen.*[64] Covered in *voces magicae*, he inevitably reminds us of the vision of truth experienced by Marcus the Magus, a map of sacred letters. Yet Marcus said that the world could not survive its masculine side, and so his masculine form is incomplete, headless.

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[61] Klimkeit, Hans Joachim, *Gnosis on the Silk Road: Gnostic Parables, Hymns and Prayers from Central Asia* (New York: HarperCollins, 1993), p. 8. This is a wonderful study despite the fact of calling all Manichaean material Gnostic in an uncritical way.

[62] *The Gospel of Philip*, in: Vidal Manzanares, César *Los Evangelios Gnósticos* (Barcelona: Martínez Roca, 1991), p. 153.

[63] *Apócrifos del Antiguo y del Nuevo Testamento*, Introducción, selección y notas de Antonio Piñero (Madrid: Alianza, 2010), p. 376.

[64] Betz, Hans Dieter, *The Greek Magical Papyri in translation, including the demotic spells* (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 1986), PGM V 96–172, p. 103. The figure associated with it is reproduced in PGM III 170, p. 18. We have also used the Spanish edition: *Textos de Magia en Papiros Griegos*, Introducción, traducción y notas de José Luis Calvo Martínez y Ma. Dolores Sánchez Romero, (Madrid: Gredos, 1987) where the invocation appears in p. 191. Interestingly, they interpret the figure in PGM III 170 as having five snake heads instead of a human one (p. 34). Sadly, this edition does not reproduce any images and abbreviates the *voces magicae*. Last but not least, there is a study by Preisendanz dedicated to this figure: Preisendanz, Karl *Akephalos, der Kopflosse Gott*, Beihefte zum Alten Orient 8 (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrich'sche Buchhandlung, 1927). Preisendanz reads it as having his sight "between" his feet, as the beheaded prisoners in the Narmer Palette (31st century BC) which would be consistent with a ritual pattern of the PGM, where so many spells are to be carried out using the remains of people who had suffered violent deaths (p. 48).

Covered in names for the Hebrew deity (Sabaoth), solar epithets,[65] and meaningless words,[66] he holds the caduceus of Hermes in the right hand, and the laurel branch of divination of Apollo in the left. This, however, has flourished like Aaron's rod, and he has one foot in the sea, and the other on the earth, as that angel whose face was like the sun (Revelation X:2).

The appearance of such mysterious names was common in magical practices and mystery cults. Regarding this, the byzantine theologian Michael Psellos (1017/18–1078/96 AD) would later comment on the *Chaldean Oracles*, that some ritual words had been transmitted by God in ancient times among the various peoples of the Earth, and that these should not be changed - otherwise their ritual powers would be lost.[67]

This will be the first partly aniconic image in our iconographic programme.

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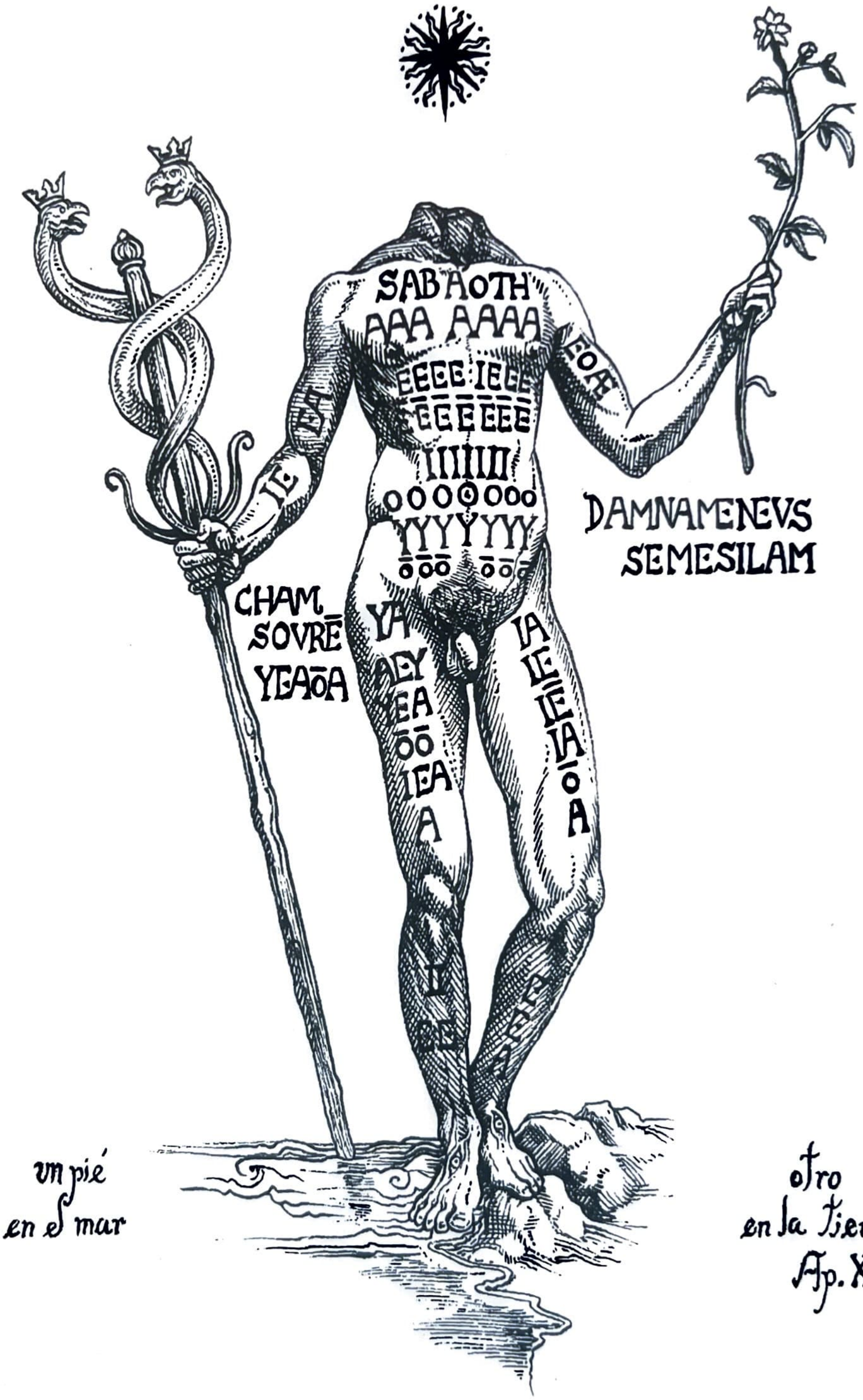
65 The term *Semesilam* would stand for "the eternal sun" (King, p. 246) and appears time and again carved on the gems displaying the *Pantheos* of Basilides.

66 *Damnameneus*, also described by King as "the sun's name in the famous 'Ephesian Spell'" (King, p. 198) or *Ephesia Grammata.*

67 *Oraculos Caldeos, con una selección de testimonios de Proclo, Pselo y M.Itálico, Numenio de Apamea: fragmentos y testimonios.* Introducciones, traducción y notas de Francisco García Bazán (Madrid: Gredos, 1991), p. 139.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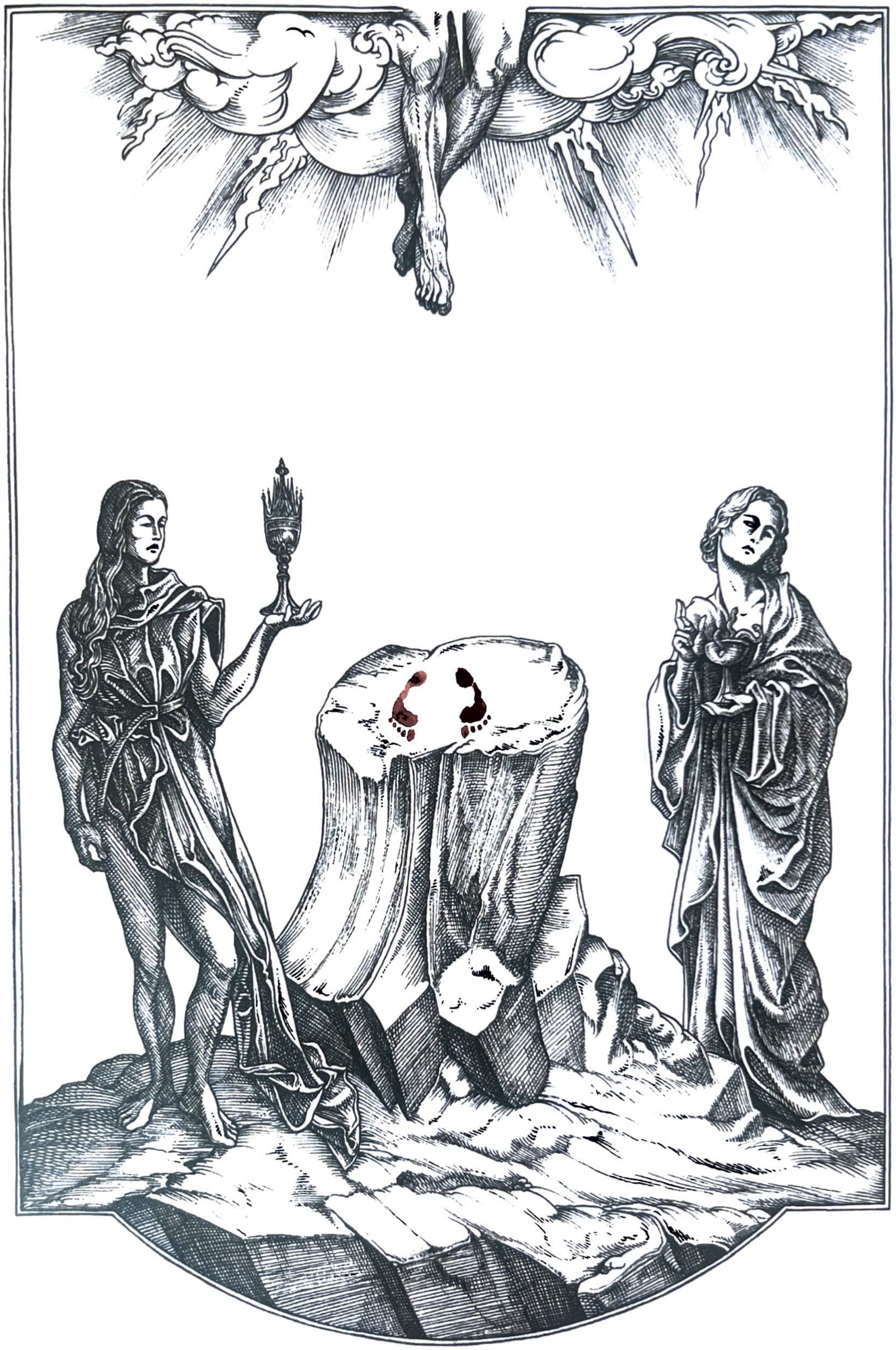

TRINITAS EST · CAPVT NOSTRV ✠

Here begins the journey of the soul towards the upper spheres, which every man should carry out to achieve liberation and reach the treasure of the light.

In so doing, we will recapitulate, in a linear fashion, all the stages that are included within the *Ophite Diagram* in a circular way. This ascension will determine the final structure of our work. Slowly, the images, as in a process of visualization, will be emptied out until the final silence is reached.

The ascension of the Christ was said to confirm the prophecy of Malachi (Malachi 4:5–6) regarding the return of Elijah and repeated throughout the Gospels (Matthew 11:14; 17:10–13; Luke 1:17; John 1:21), but a similar thing was said about Enoch. Therefore, we depicted both Elijah and Enoch in the opening piece of this book in a similar manner.

This iconography for the ascension appeared profusely in *Books of Hours* and in both the aforementioned *Biblia Pauperum* and *Specula*. Here, however, we have only included two disciples: John the Evangelist and Mary Magdalene. John's chalice is open, depicting the mystery of the snake and its poison, but Mary's chalice is closed. This is because John's book, despite its elevated complexity, was assimilated into the exoteric doctrine, while Mary's Gospel remained a fringe and esoteric work. John's depiction is clearly based in the Ghent Altarpiece[68] (1432), yet it is here intended to make John feminine and Mary masculine. He was the beloved disciple, and the Gospel of Thomas tells how if a female turns herself into a male, she shall enter the Kingdom of Heaven.[69] Thus, both apostles form the holy androgyny.

The miraculous footprints might have their origins in legends told by pilgrims returning from the Holy Land during the Middle Ages, who claimed to have seen them.[70] They take us again to the notion of a seal, the way in which the heavenly body is thought to constantly irradiate light, leaving transcendent marks on this contingent reality; such sacred glyphs constitute relics in which the body is absent. Similar symbols can be found, charged with highly mystical interpretations, in the "Lotus feet" of both Vishnu and the Buddha. Moreover, the footprints of the apostle Bartholomew, or Thomas in

[68] It was, in fact, drawn after an XVI century ivory carving that follows the same model, currently at the Barbosa-Stern Collection, Lima.

[69] *Apócrifos del Antiguo y del Nuevo Testamento*, Introducción, selección y notas de Antonio Piñero. (Madrid: Alianza, 2010) p. 344.

[70] Fouquet, Jean, *The Hours of Etienne Chevalier*, Preface by Charles Sterling, Introduction and Legends by Claude Schaefer (London: Thames and Hudson, 1972). See Schaefer's commentary on plate 3.

other accounts, were said to be found in American soil by indigenous chronicles of the XVI century.[71]

Following this, the ascending soul will have to trespass the gates of the Archons, taking the path drawn on the sky by the celestial snake. His guide is the cynocephalus, the Alexandrian Psychopomp, and the Archons whose names we have already introduced in the diagram, who are shaped after ancient deities – in this case interpreted as Horus, Apis, and Onochoetes (the blasphemy recorded by Tertullian, which depicted the Christian god as a donkey with a book and a toga). The patterns of this after-death journey, which could have been enacted during an initiation ritual, seem to be taken from the Egyptian Book of the Dead.

Anubis opens the door...(the initiate) Covering his face and stumbling because of the Hidden things, he entereth into the house of Osiris.[72]

Just as with the gates of the Archons, the initiate was meant to recognize and pronounce their respective names:

We will not let thee enter in by us...unless thou speakest our name.[73]

The soul, then, was liberated by an act of sacred remembrance. The pillar includes another stele of *Zeus Meilichios*[74] and the golden bough given to Aeneas by the Sybil, which allowed him to travel through the underworld safely. Before departing, he is to be confronted with that "Monstruous figure of time" as Pettazzoni[75] described the composite Mithraic figure identified with the Persian Ahriman, holding a wand and a key. Time is the destroyer, *Kala*, the lord of becoming, death and rebirth. The snake is eternity.

Once the empyrean has been reached, the soul will enter the realms of the Aeons, whose number varies heavily between the writings. We have chosen the list of twelve Aeons, and they are depicted as different suns, each being the light of a potential universe; a whole cosmogenesis can occur at every stage – let us not forget how *Abrasax* was said to rule over up to 365 heavens. The sun of this world, obscure and diminished, looks scornfully at the initiate. Aeons were considered as measures of time, but also as the doxa, the ruling morality of a whole age (Luke 20:34–36). As such, they constitute complete microcosms, ways of perceiving and engaging with the world. Only in Gnostic writings can they be found personified as higher beings, and just as with the "twin" principle expressed by Thomas, we depict them sprouting forth from the enlightened mind as refractions and degrees of a higher self.

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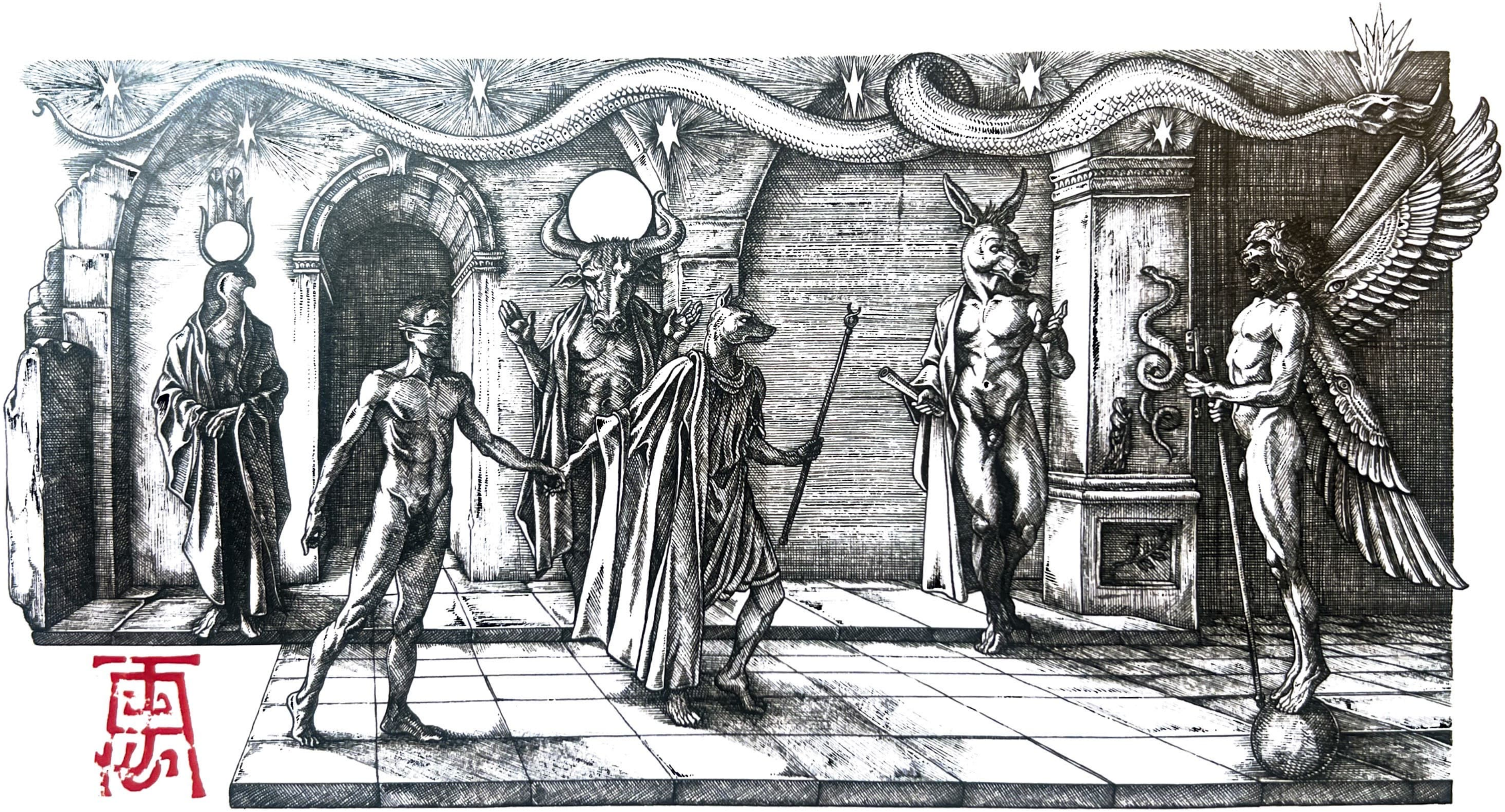
[71] Estenssoro, Juan Carlos, "Construyendo la memoria: la figura del inca y el reino del Perú, de la conquista a Túpac Amaru II, pp. 93–171, in Cummins, Thomas, et. Al. *Los Incas: Reyes del Perú* (Lima: Banco de Crédito, 2005), p. 149.

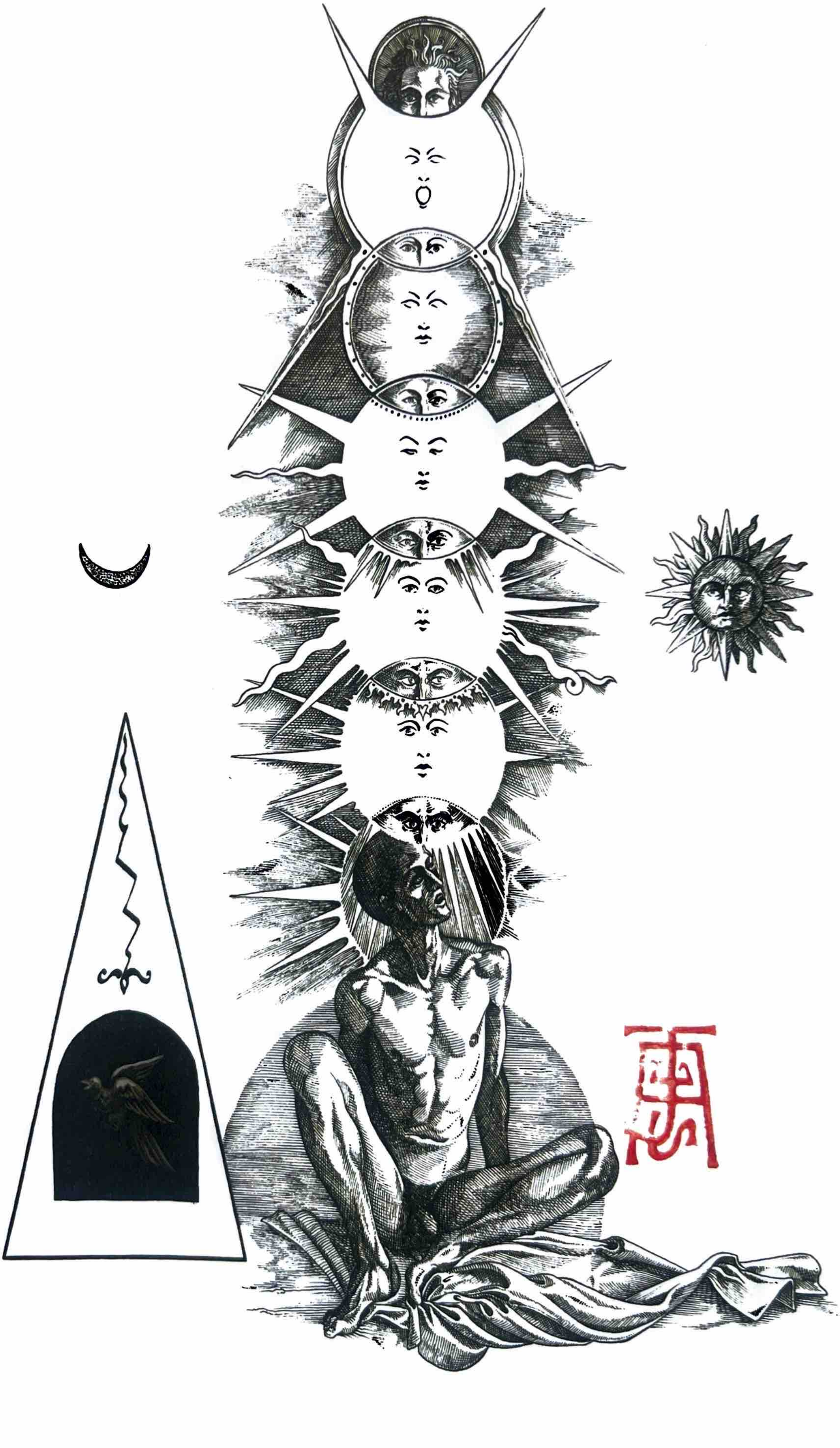
[72] Blackden, M. W., *Ritual of the Mystery of the Judgment of the Soul, From an ancient Egyptian Papyrus* (London: Bernard Quaritch, 1914), p. 11.

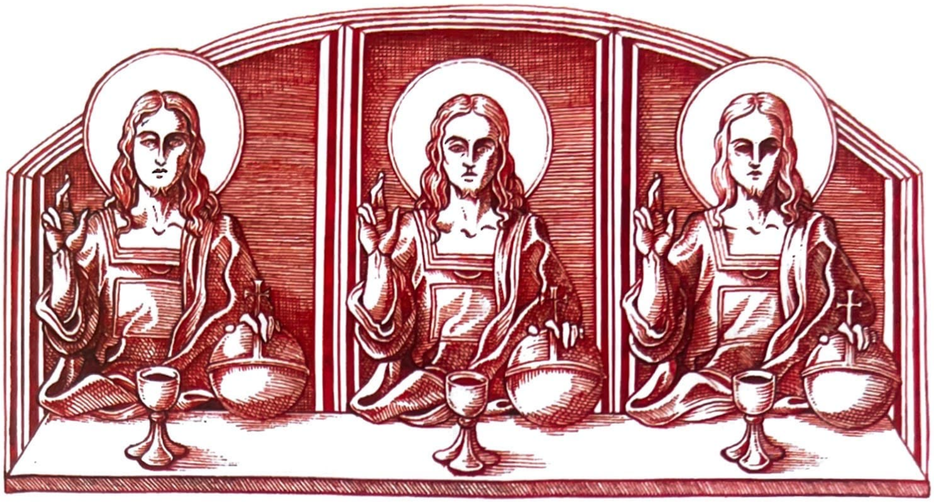
[73] Ibid., p. 28.

[74] Harrison, Jane Ellen, *Prolegomena to the study of Greek religion* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1903), p. 19.

[75] See: "The Monstrous figure of Time in Mithraism," Pettazzoni, Raffaele, *Essays on the History of Religions* (Leiden: Brill, 1954), pp. 180–192.







As stated, our process will consist of boiling down images from multiplicity to unity, from unity to emptiness. The depiction of three identical Christs for the Trinity causes strangeness in modern spectators, yet it seems to have been widely popular in the XVIII century. Here we have recreated the mural of an altar at the *Monte Sacro di Ghiffa*, Piemonte, by an anonymous XVI-century Italian painter.

It might have its origin In the episode where Abraham and his wife receive three visitors, (Genesis 18:1–15) interpreted as a prefiguration of the Trinity. In the Eastern churches, the three angels of this narrative are still revered as the "Icon of the Trinity" most famously rendered by Andrei Rublev (in 1411 or 1425–27).

Ramón Mujica traces back their iconographic origins to byzantine depictions of emperors,[76] which might have as well been used as a response against the heresy of Arius (256–336 AD) by emphasizing the Christs' equality with the Father. XVI to XVIII century Spanish treatises on painting, as those by Francisco Pacheco, Vicente Carducho, or Juan Interián de Ayala have no consensus on this image. Some consider it acceptable, others deem it so only if the three persons have distinctive attributes for recognizing them;[77] others see it as plain heresy. Later, the Catholic Church seemingly forbid this image by extension, by forbidding the depiction of the Holy Spirit under a human form in an edict in 1928.[78]

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[76] Mujica, Ramón, *La imagen transgredida: Ensayos de iconografía peruana y sus políticas de representación simbólica* (Lima: Fondo editorial del Congreso del Perú, 2016), p. 329.

[77] For example, the engraving entitled: *Dios mio Trino y Uno y todas las cosas*, Joaquín de Sotomayor, 1736, in de Oviedo, Juan Antonio S. J. (1670–1757), *El devoto de la Santissima Trinidad* (Ciudad de México: Joseph Bernardo de Hogal, 1736).

However, these images can still be found in churches all around Latin America; they are, in fact, so hyper-abundant that we had to give up on the task of cataloguing them comprehensively. Despite this, their mysterious, almost polytheistic nature remains intact and unanswered. They look back at the beholder from the worn-out gilding of the altars, as intuitions from the past which we can no longer experience or explain. Levels of sacred life which are landmarks on an unfinished map towards the divine.

In this image we see multiplicity at its greatest expression, probably only surpassed by rare medieval experiments as the "Quinity" of Winchester[79] which show us how, before the council of Trent (1545 and 1563), iconography was not fully dictated by the Western Church. It was an organic, ongoing process between tradition, experimentation, and mystical experience. Our ultimate ideal is that of a painter-theologian capable of contributing to this living process, between vision, creation, and theory, in an educated but unorthodox way.

For the process to be a regressive counting, we shall engage with the rarer example of two identical Christs with a dove in their centre. Duality is probably the most dangerous concept for Monotheism, and precisely the Trinity has been explained as allowing a regression to unity; since a triangle has a centre, how then is this possible?

This image appears in the Book of Hours of Isabel la Católica (1495–1500) and in her breviary[80] (1497); it might as well have originated as a response to Arianism. Despite their identical appearance, the viewer was expected to recognize the Son based on Psalm 110. The detail that the wings of the dove touch both mouths was used to express the *Filioque*, the Holy Spirit as proceeding from both the Father and the Son in the Latin Creed; while in the Greek version, it proceeds from the Father alone. Despite the emphasis on Jesus' clothing as being one seamless robe, Eastern iconography often depicts him wearing blue and red, symbolical of his two natures, human and divine. We have therefore separated the two colours as a reference to the Arian controversy. Was he fully human or fully divine, and how then are they fully identical? They remind us of the syzygy, the sacred twins, one earthly and the other heavenly, Nara and Narayana.

---

[78] "*DE REPRAESENTATIONE SPIRITUS SANCTI SUB FORMA HUMANA*
Proposito Supremae huic Sacrae Congregationi Sancti Officii dubio:
'An repraesentari possit Spiritus Sanctus sub forma humana sive cum
Patre et Filio sive seorsim'
—Feria IV, die U Martii 1928" *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, Vol. XX, N. 4. 1928, p. 103.

[79] Kantorowicz, Ernst H., "The Quinity of Winchester" in *Selected Studies of Ernst Kantorowicz* (New York: J. J. Augustine, 1965).

[80] British Library, Add. Ms. 18851, fol. 477v.

This duality is to be resolved through the angelic Adam, the androgynous form under which he was created in the image of Elohim (Genesis 1:26–27) male and female, before being separated from Eve (Genesis 2:21–23) and to which he is to return (Luke 20:36). It is the *last Adam* (Corinthians 15:45) that is a life-giving spirit, and the angelic, winged form is truer to the image and likeness of the lord, as we can infer that he also has wings from Psalm 91:4. This is the glorious body which, as we have many times expressed, is the highest doctrine and vision.

What we can express in the form of discourse ends
here. All that remains is to sing.

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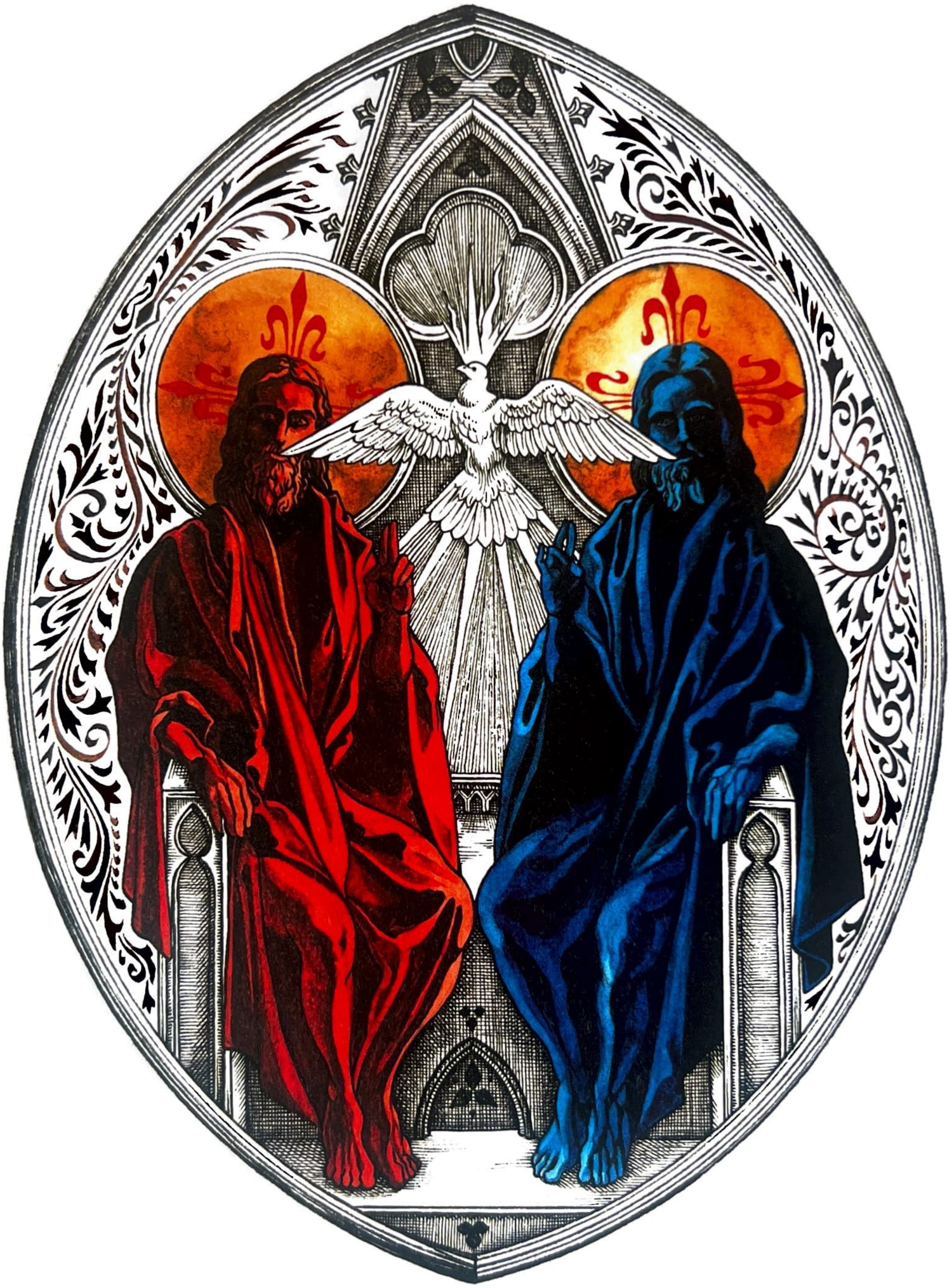

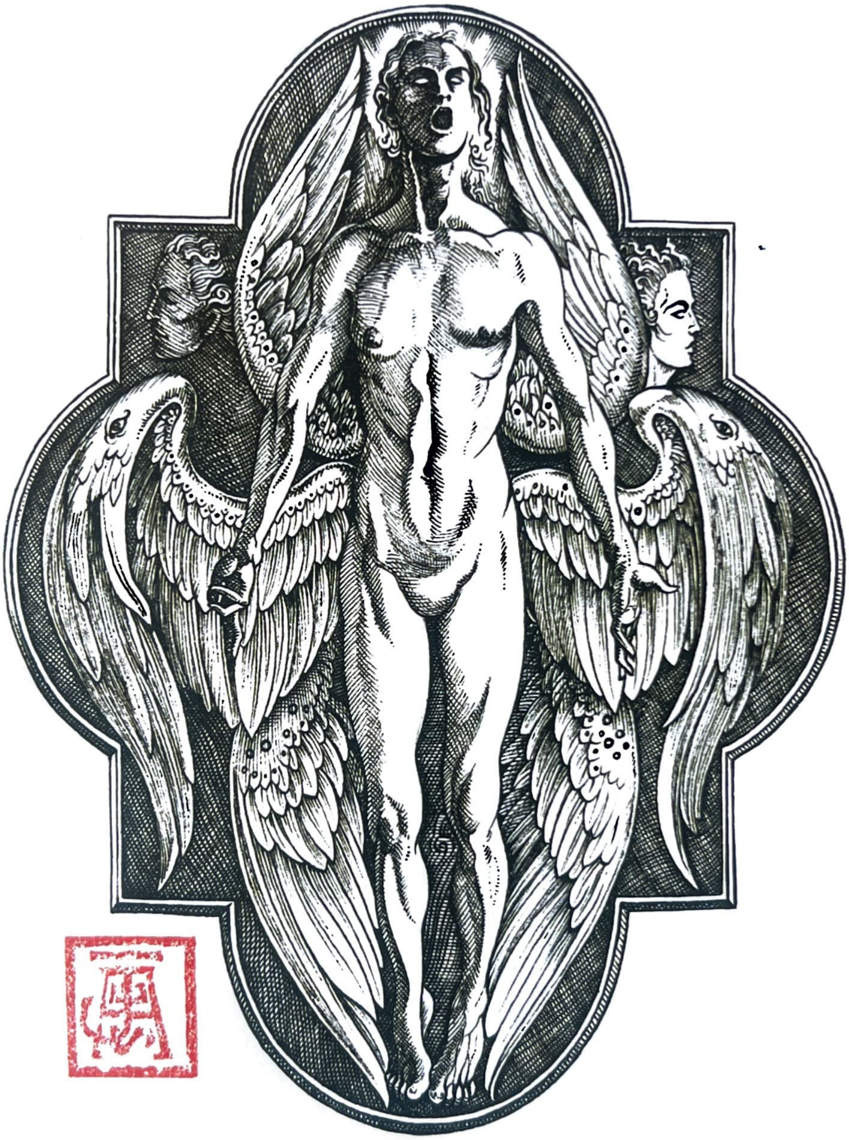

IAO

IAD

HO ON

I search for you through roads that men do not walk
Trails that have not been drawn
The footprints of those who have walked upon them have dissolved
In the turbulence of the waters

Who could read the ashes?
Who could purify the unclean?[81]
Who drinks poison and lives?

Footprints engraved in the mountain peaks that none has seen
That which remains unuttered in the oracle's mouth
What trails do the birds leave when they cross the air?[82]
The same as Elijah and Enoch
Leave no flesh to the abyss
The Oracle said.

Setheus
Source of all Aeons
This is the river that flows from Paradise
This is the serpent that in the latter days has appeared in
the form of man
To bring the sword of discernment
The lightning and the fiery word
That once sparked in the perfect mind of the self-begotten

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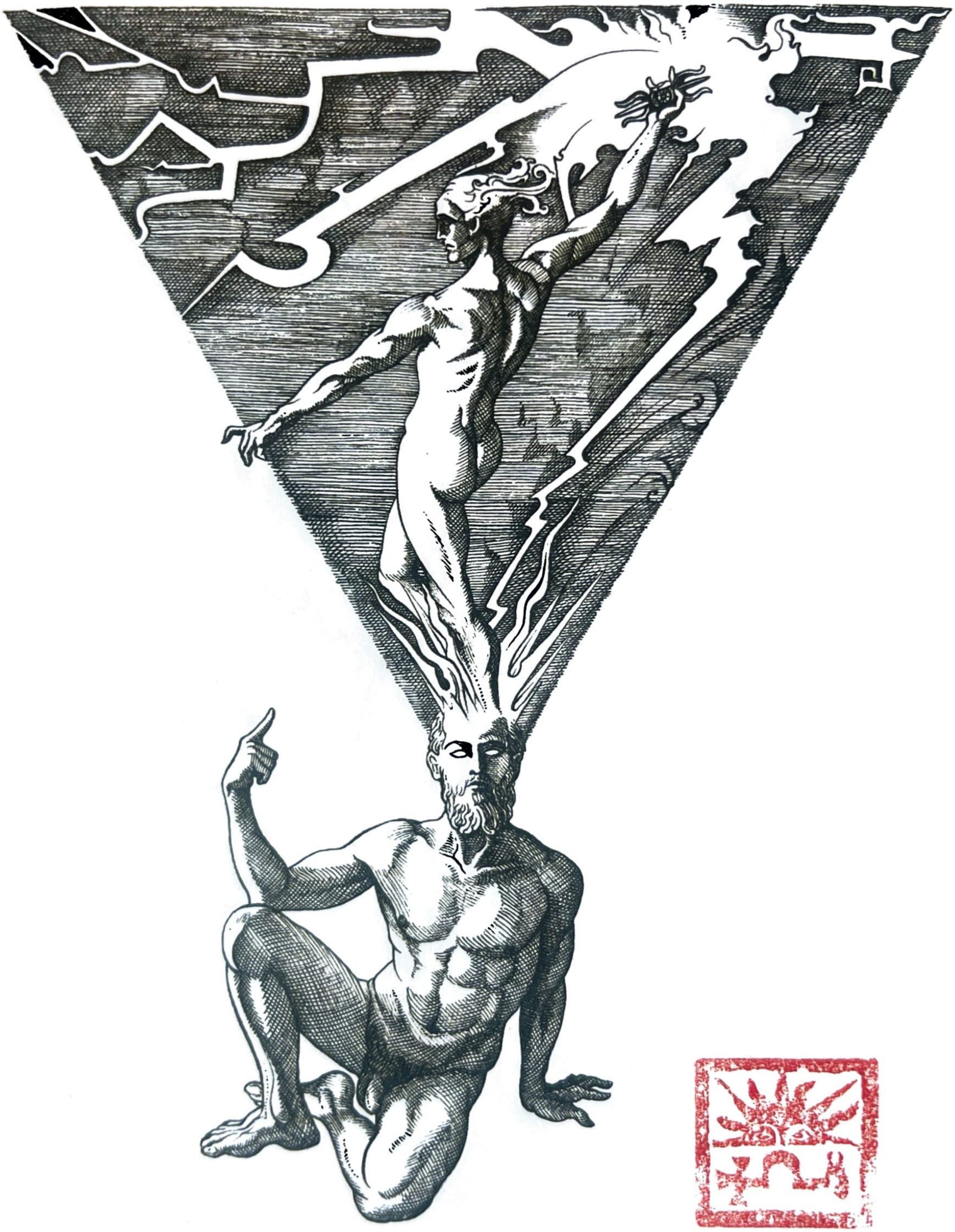
[81] Job 14:4.
[82] RV.I.XXV.7.



Lightning, Perfect Mind
The bearer of lightning has always been the companion
of the enlightened one,[83]
Since the very beginning.
The beginning occurs in that secret miracle
Within the state of supreme solitude[84]
Taking the earth as witness.[85]

Outside the blissful realm of eternal reality that is the mind
Stands, four eyed, the god and his self.
The book is his symbol.[86]

This is the teaching of Brahman, with regards to the gods: It is that which now flashes forth in the lightning, and now vanishes again.[87]

The yearning for the spirit
Becomes piercing.
I want nothing else than to be in presence and
contemplation of the One.

Between the twelve Aeons,
His vesture bears the five mysterious words.[88]

---

[83] Vajrapani.

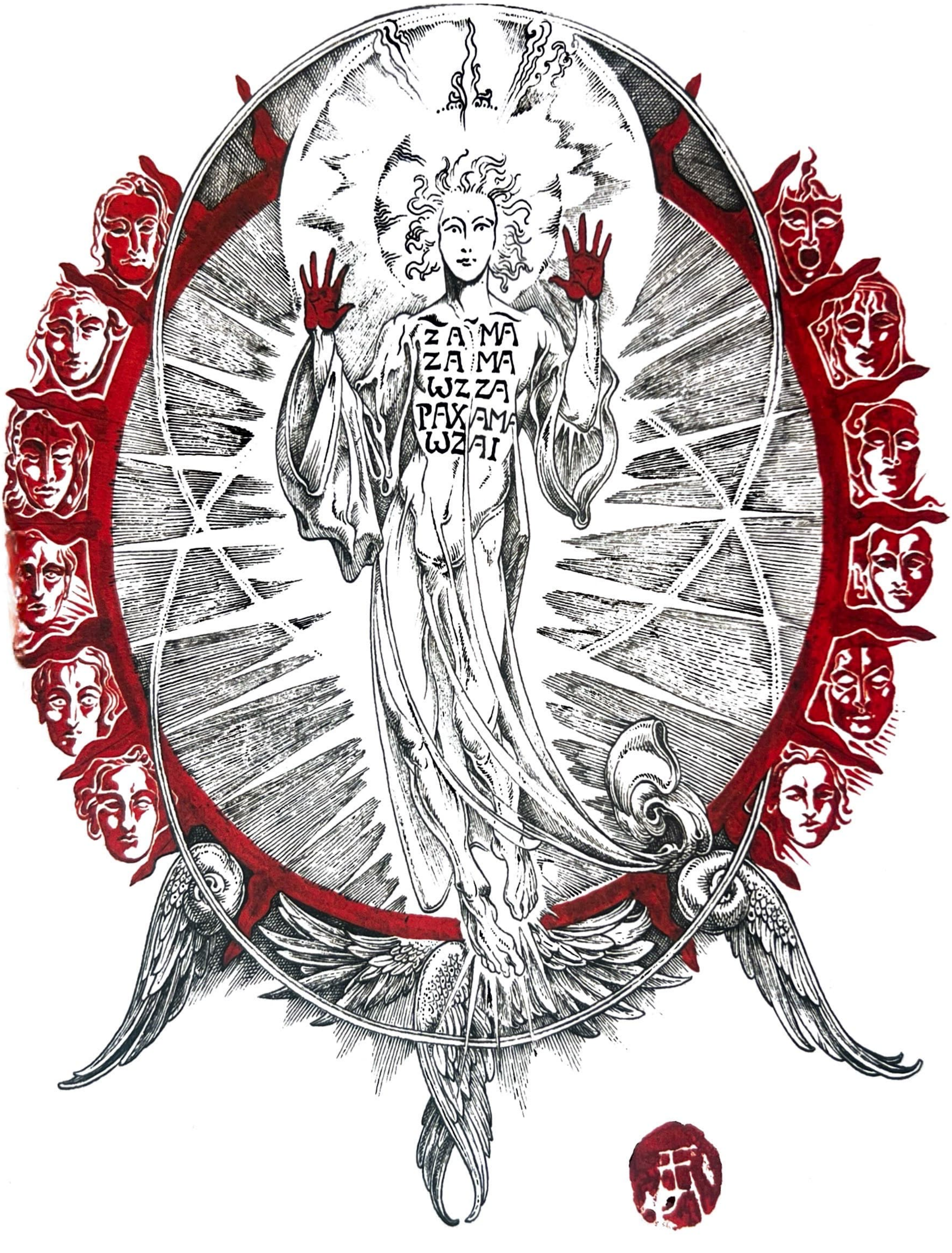
[84] Kaivalyapada.

[85] Bhumisparsha.

[86] Paradiso, Canto XXXIII. The detail of a three-faced head with an open book is rendered after the *Palla della Signoria* by Fra Bartolomeo, 1510, currently at the National Museum of San Marco, Florence.

[87] Kena Upanishad IV.4, in Müller, Max, *The Sacred Books of the East, Volume I* (Varanasi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1988), p. 151.

[88] *Pistis Sophia: A Gnostic Gospel* (London: The Theosophical Publishing Society, 1896), p. 16. After rendering our image of the Gnostic Christ among the twelve Aeons, we found that it bears strong similarities with the images for the Holy Spirit based on the vision of the nun Maria Crescentia Höss (1682–1744), forbidden by Pope Benedict XIV in 1745, in his *Solicitudini Nostrae.* See: Ojeda, Almerindo, "Las fuentes grabadas de la Trinidad Crescentina en el arte colonial," in *Mestizajes en Diálogo: Memoria del VIII Encuentro internacional sobre barroco* (Arequipa, 2015).


ZA MA
ZA MA
WZ ZA
PAX AMA
WZ AI

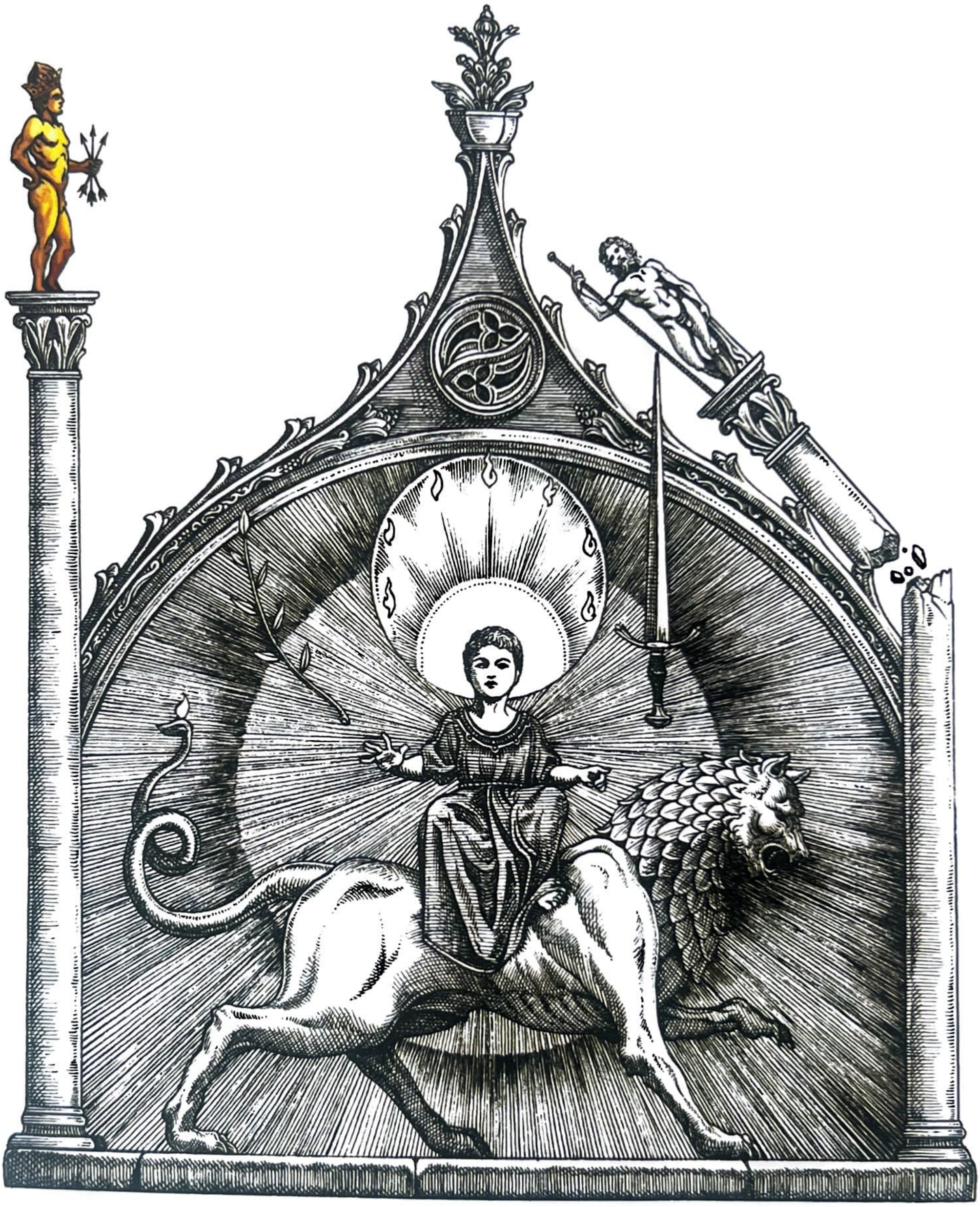
Reappears
Depurates
It becomes primordial.
I know it but it comes back.[89]

The initiate is to ride that lion-headed power
Instead of denying it.
He is to create an idol just to destroy it afterwards.[90]
Discipline and disobedience.
Idolater, Iconoclast
Discerning intellect and profane divination.

---

[89] This recurring image is from Hildegard von Bingen's *Liber Scivias* (1151–52), the illumination for the second vision of part II.

[90] Psalm 135:15 *The idols of the nations are silver and gold, made by human hands*. The arrows were the divinatory tools of *Hebal*, one of the 360 idols said to be revered at the Kaaba before the coming of Islam. See: King, 1887, p. 305.



In a cave where you can not see the sun during the day nor the
moon at night, you will see the eternal sun.

The cave is a sleeping place, dark, silent, uterine.
But in her there is awakening and hierophany.

Obscuring the waters
For the sake of crystalline knowledge.

The wise man dressed in arms is the same as the wise man naked.
The robe with which he covers himself is the same as his flesh.
Just as fire, sun and lightning are all light.[91]
The river, the sea and the blood are all water.
The body, the bowl and the earth are all clay.
And darkness is only one.
But the wise man is different from all men.

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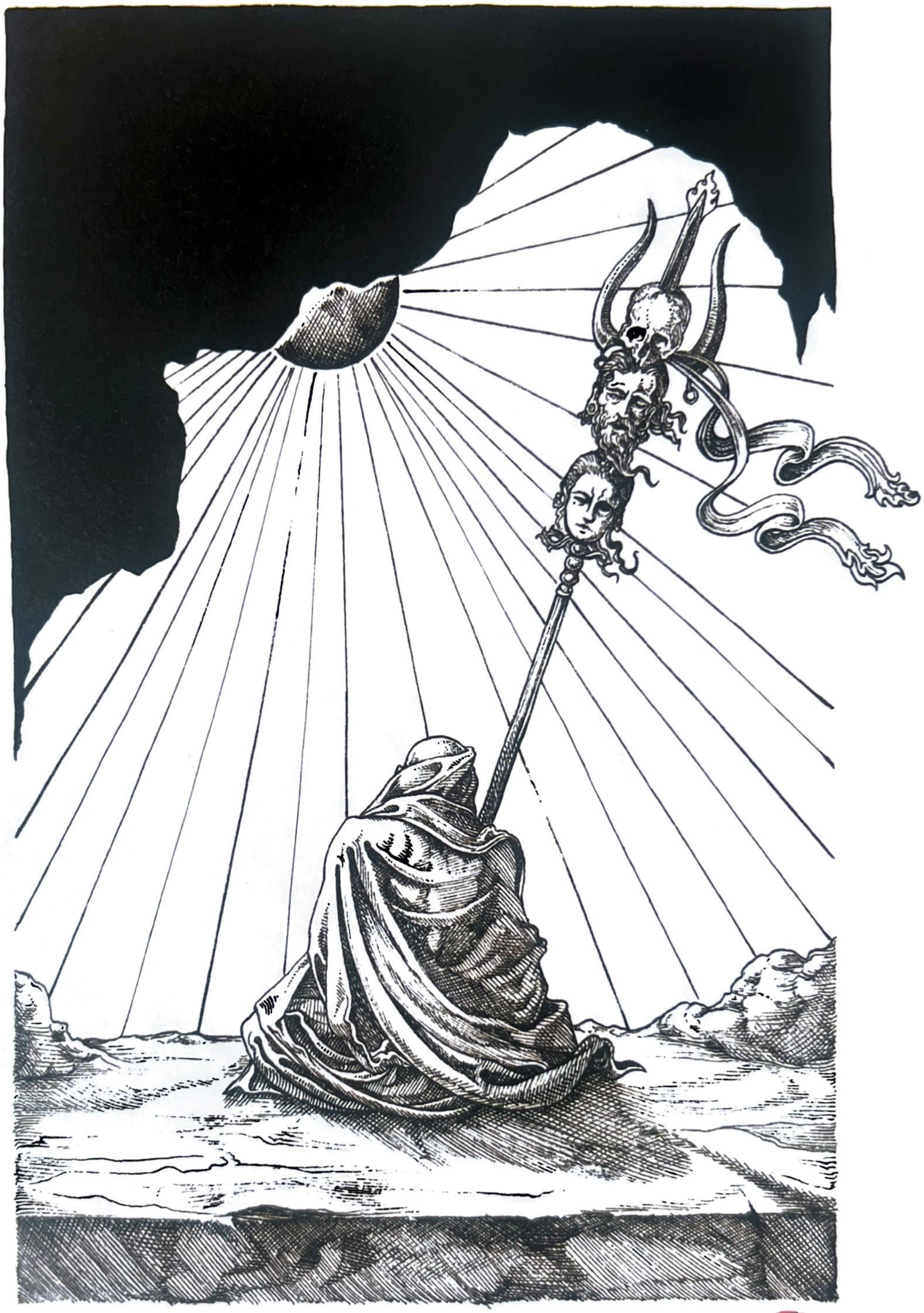
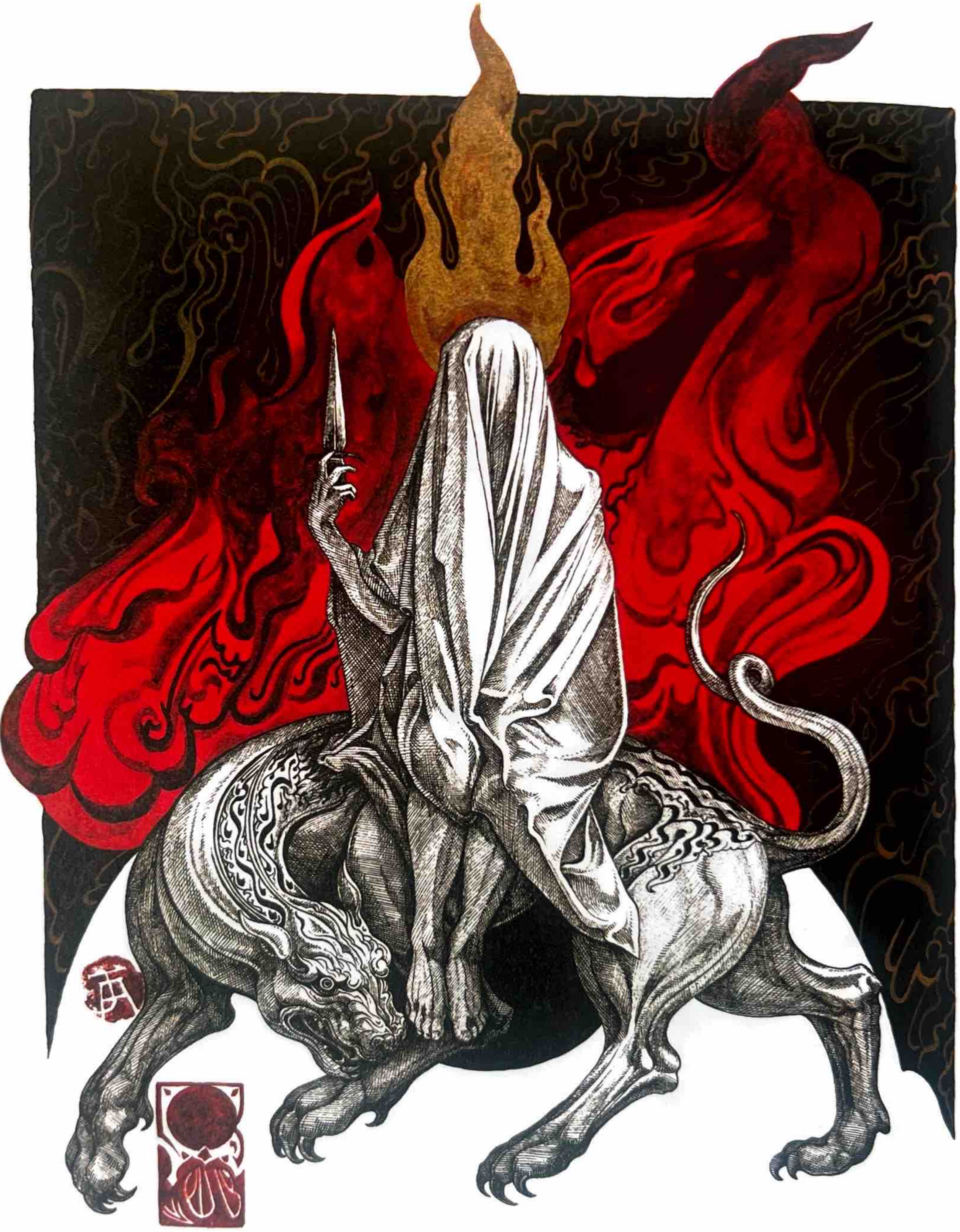
[91] RV I.XXII.16–17.





The empty throne is the epitome of aniconism; it is the emptiness and silence of the deity as an ineffable being, in a way in which only the Areopagite has perceived it. We have not engaged in the *Via Negationis* through iconoclasm but through visualization, letting images arise and dissolve.

This scene is based in the *Codex Brucianus*:

> He [the Fruit of the Æons] has a Fount before Him surrounded by twelve Holy Ones, each one wearing a Crown on his head and having twelve powers, who surround Him within, praising the Alone-begotten king and crying, "It is because of Thee that we ray forth glory, and it is by Thee that we behold the Father of the Universe, AAA, ΩΩΩ.[92]

Under them there is a sea of glass and fire (Revelation 15:2) and their thrones are the ones that, according to Boethius, were left empty by the fallen angels, and shall be occupied by angelic men in the end of times.[93]

This empty throne is shared in the iconography of early Buddhism and Christianity. But the byzantine *Hetimasia* denotes expectation – it is a preparation of the throne for a king yet to come, while the Buddhist empty throne in Gandharan art is a symbol of the Tathagata, the one who is gone. This symbol can be understood in both ways. Here, it stands for the ultimate emptiness of the supreme Aeon, who is unknowable.

From here the only image left is the vision of the narrow gate as described by Matthew 7:14.

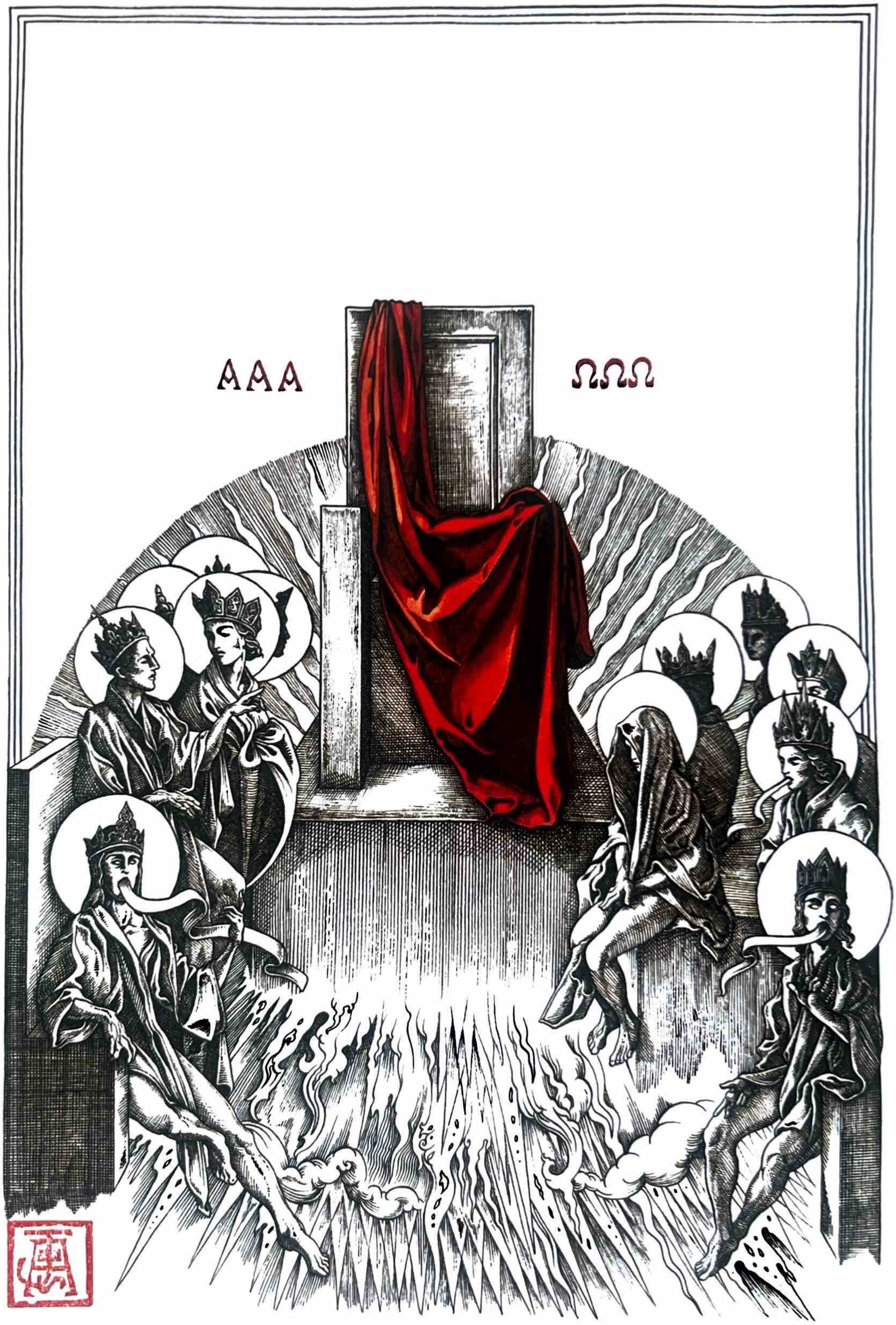
All these images to reach the invisible!
We see the contradiction and assert it with joy.
For the path is the only thing that exists,
and from the gate, none has come back.
He who calls himself a man of wisdom is deceived.
That, only the gods know.
Or perhaps, they know it not.[94]

---

[92] Lamplugh, B.A., Rev. F., *The Gnosis of the Light: A Translation of the Untitled Apocalypse in the Codex Brucianus with Introduction and Notes* (London: Watkins, 1918). p. 14.

[93] Boecio *Cinco Opúsculos Teológicos (Opuscula Sacra)*, textos traducidos y anotados por Julio Picasso Muñoz (Lima: PUCP, 2002), p. 120.

[94] RV.X. CXXIX.7.


ΑΑΑ
ΩΩΩ

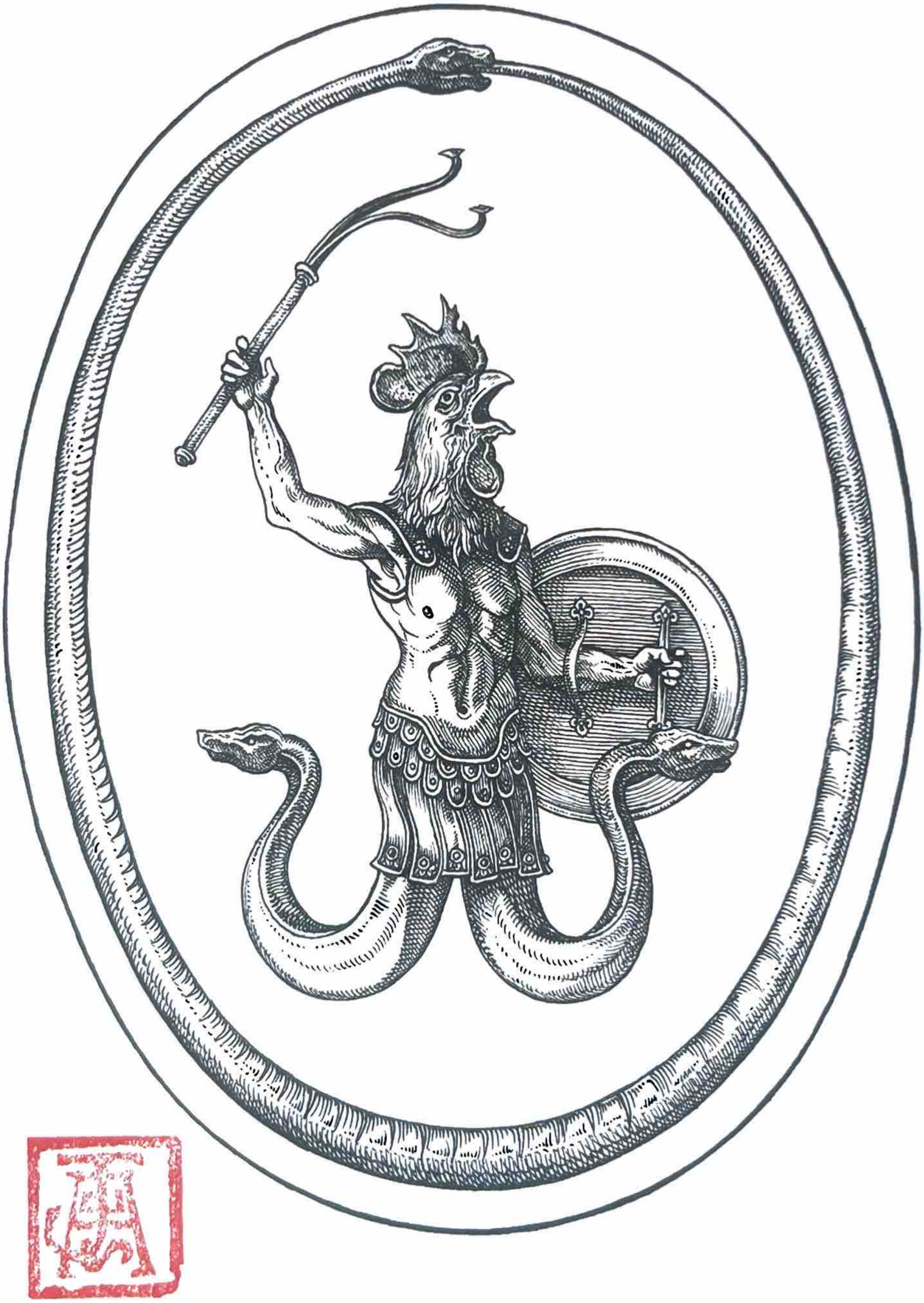
IV

APPENDIX

*

Sibylline Dialogues

AN
IMAGINARY CONVERSATION
WITH
WILLIAM BLAKE



DIÁLOGOS SIBILINOS (*Sibylline Dialogues*) is subjective visual interpretation of William Blake's figures and poems in his Illuminated books, which is why it is called a dialogue. It was rendered from August 2015 to March 2016 as a manuscript.

The process aimed for regression when approaching the visionary moments of insight and revelation that inspired Blake's images.

The visions of biblical prophets which had an impact in Blake's oeuvre are given paramount importance, and contrasted with the Sibyls, who played an interesting role in ancient Christianity, mirroring the prophetic spirit of ancient Israelites in pagan women.

Blake believed "That the poetic Genius is the True Man" (*All Religions are One*, Plate 4, 1st Principle) which was to be found in ancient prophets and myths, and we want to give further life to this spirit through the constant exercise of mythopoetic imagination.

He found in the illuminated book a unique platform of expression which is both intimate and powerful, and printed his own limited editions in which almost every printed exemplar is unique. Therefore, making a manuscript, that at the same time resembles a printed book with engravings, is a paradox that could serve as a proper homage to such a wonderful madman.

Another important consideration regarding the manuscript as an art form is that it combines visual and written languages simultaneously in an organic whole. This relationship is reciprocal: Calligraphy is an aesthetic element of the image, and its message complements and conditions the way in which such an image is perceived. Most importantly, though, it mirrors the synesthetic experience of visions, in which all senses are merged and overwhelmed by the experiences of transcendence.

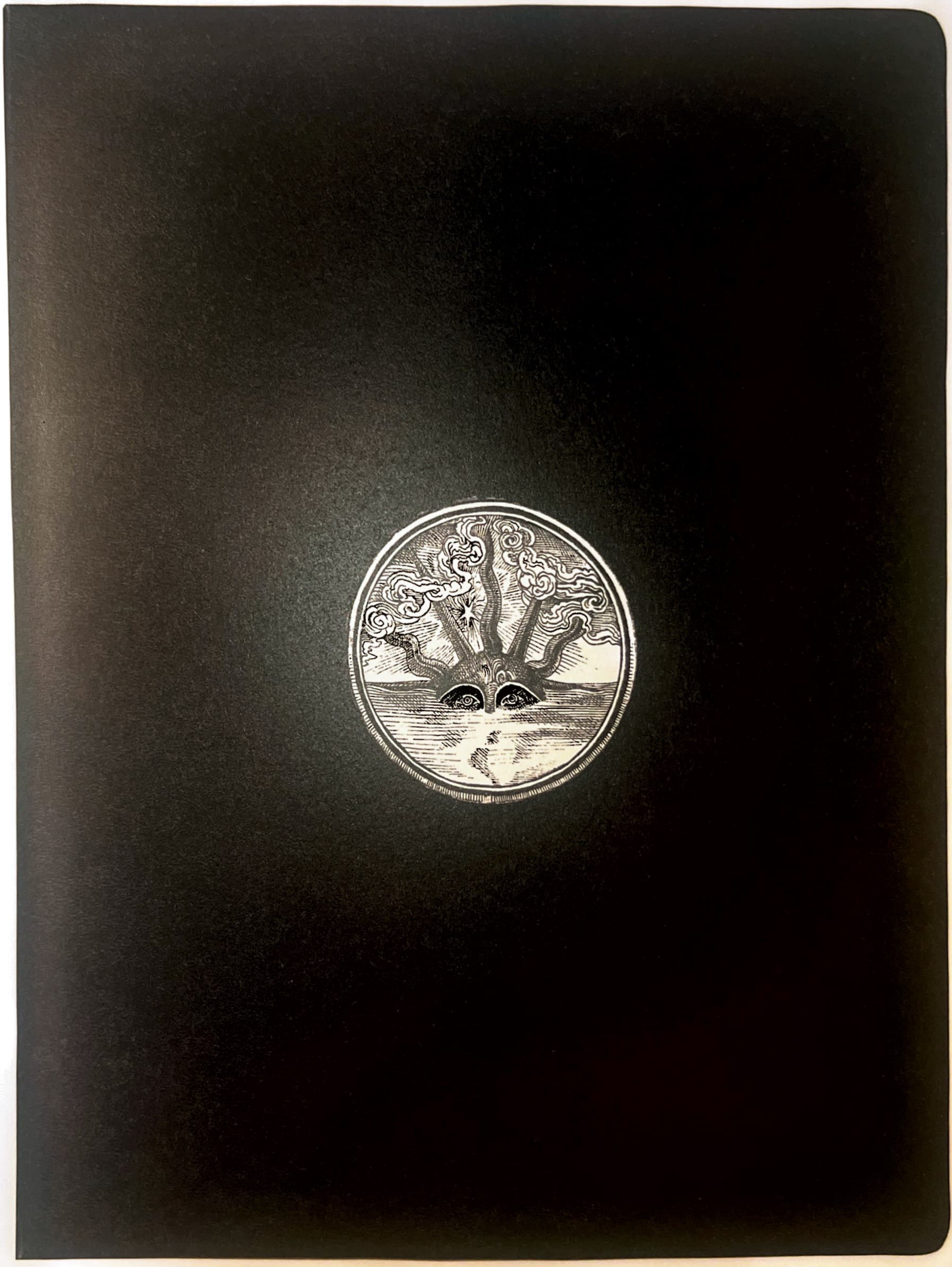
Some archetypes in the "dialogue" are *Urizen* (demiurge or "abusive father" figure), *Orc* (his enemy, the rebel, serpent shaped) and *Rintrah* (the raging prophet). The reader may already be familiar to them, and the author does not claim to be an expert in Blake's work, nor for this to be an academic work. On the contrary, it is a response to Blake based on how his works have spoken to the author over the years, a personal confession and homage to a master who is no longer alive, but whose spirit certainly lives on.

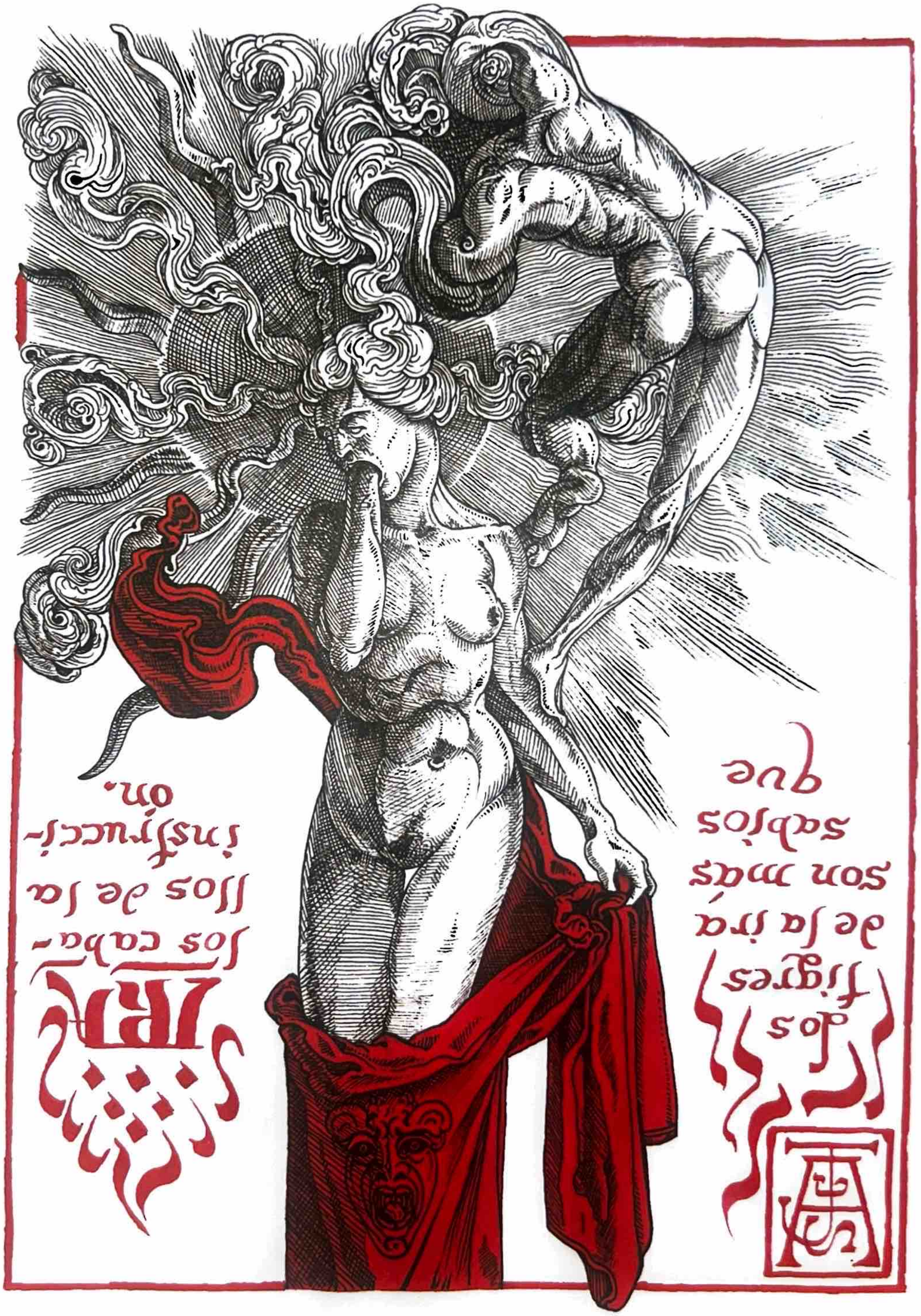
Just as the words of the sibyls, the numinous is always ambiguous, and in the *Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, even Jehova and Satan seem to be interchangeable. The dichotomy of body and spirit, and the yearning toward the divine union of both gives birth to an intense panentheism. All in all, it is unequivocally in honour of energy.

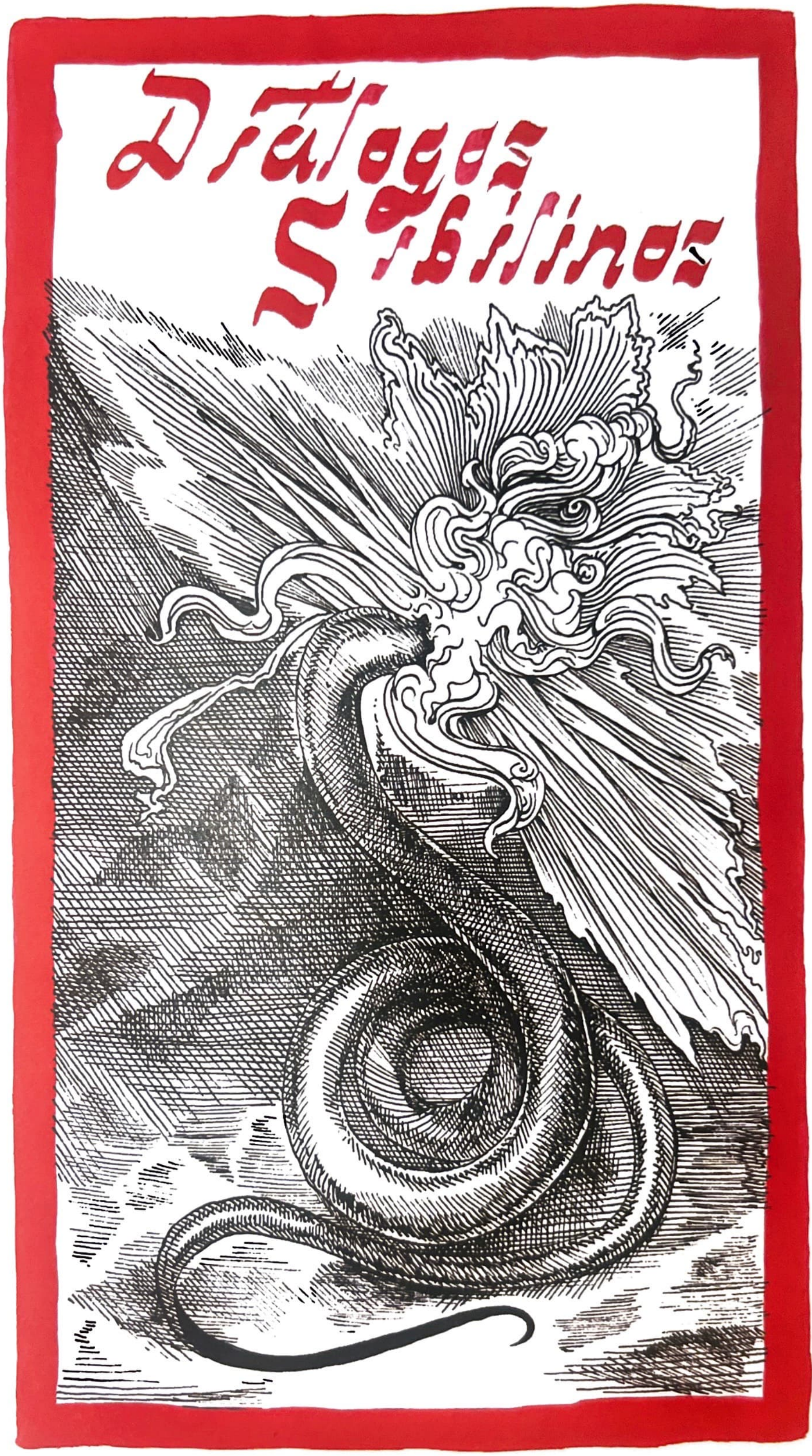
Regarding artistic aspects, the reader may recognize, instead of a *Blakean* influence, the enormous influence of Dürer in the drawing style and line technique. Another, older master has been invited to the table, but this is not more daring than when Blake asserts that he dined with the prophets Ezekiel and Isaiah, and Dürer was, in fact, an important influence for Blake as well.

Blake created a whole world, and there was almost no response to it in his lifetime. His work shows that the artist is not obliged to express the "spirit of his time." In the same manner, it is quite clear that the present work does not constitute what is artificially said to be contemporary. Here we have tried to partake in Blake's visionary world, and the reader is invited to do so as well.

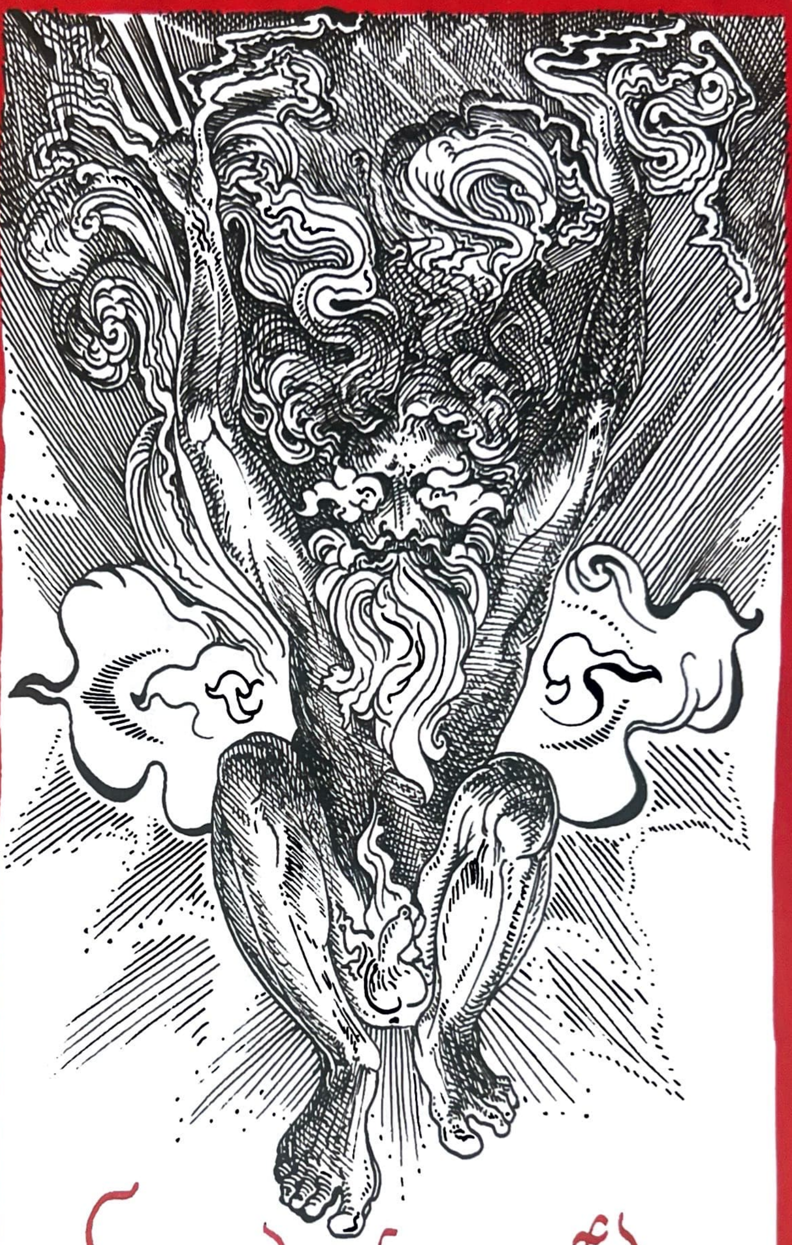
MMXV



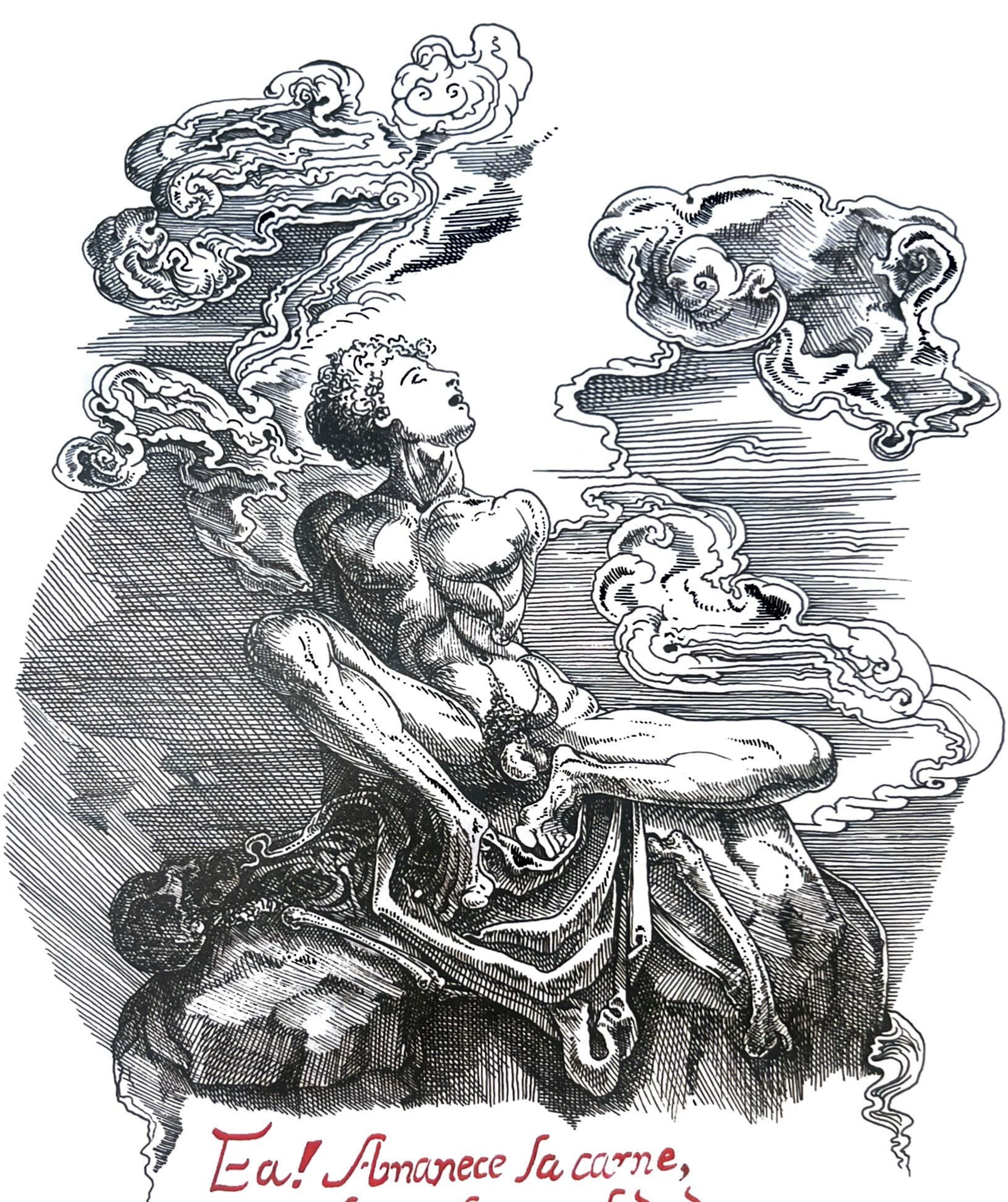

IRA
los tigres de la ira son más sabios que
los caballos de la instrucción.


Diálogos Sibilinos

1

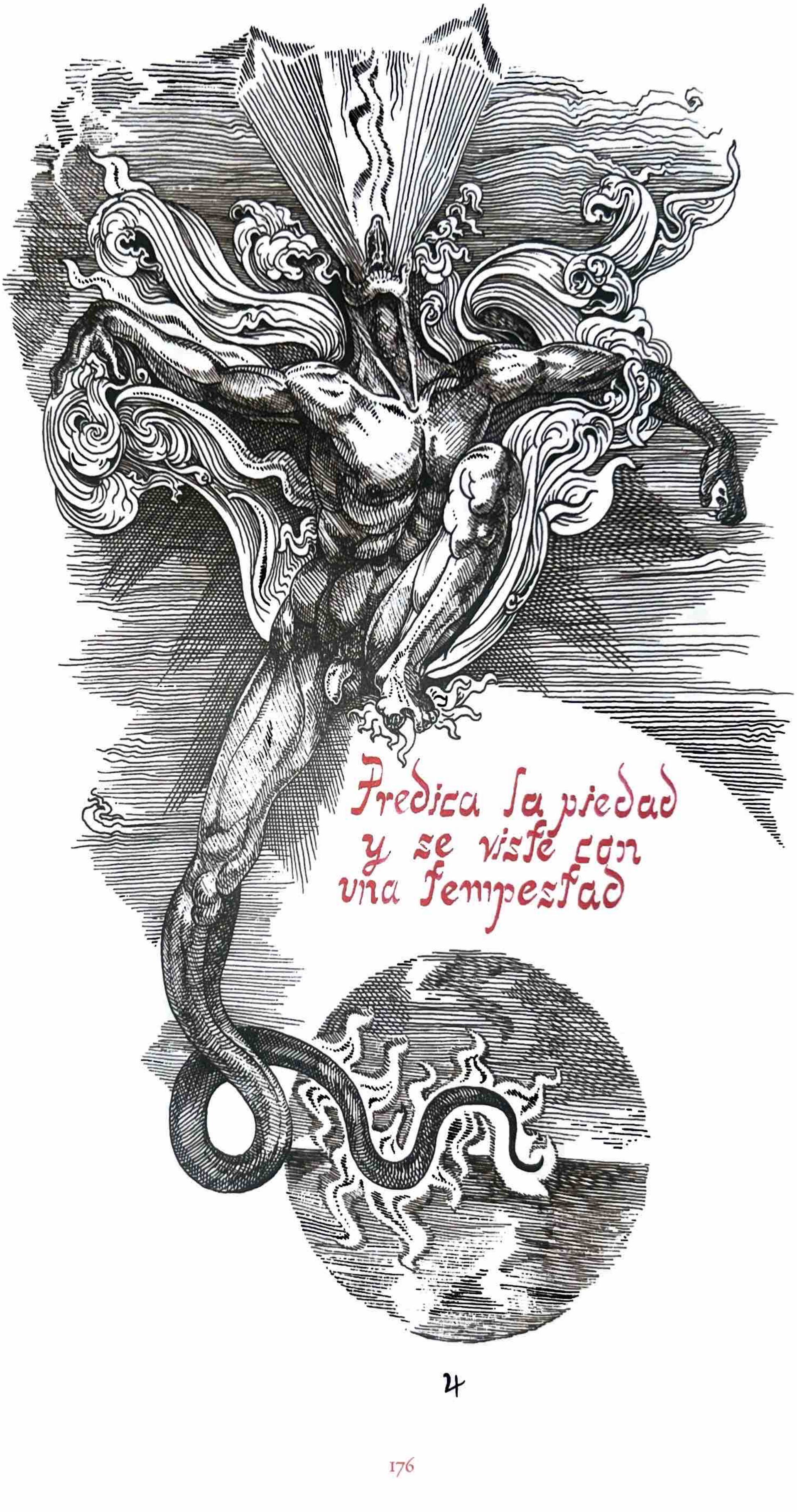


Cuando los sentidos
no perciben,
emanan.



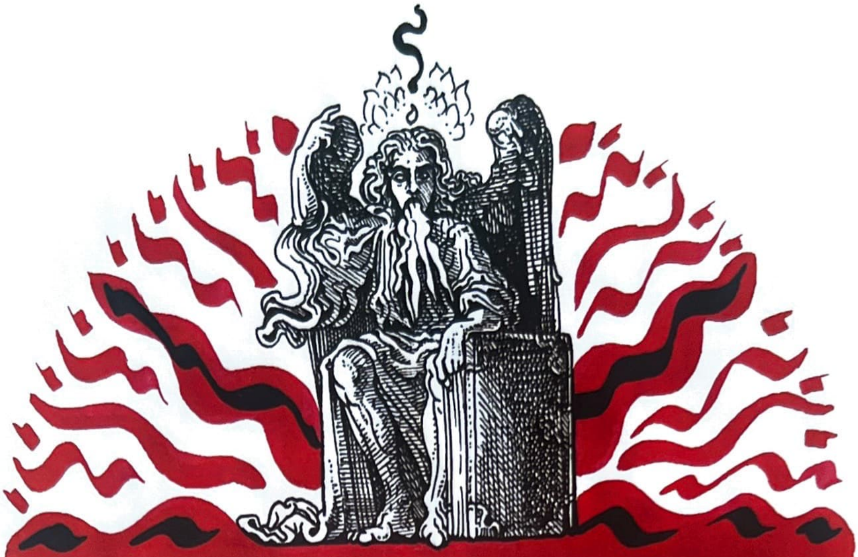
Ea! Amanece la carne,
despierta a otra realidad.
Aurora se levanta.

3



Predica la piedad
y se viste con
una tempestad

4

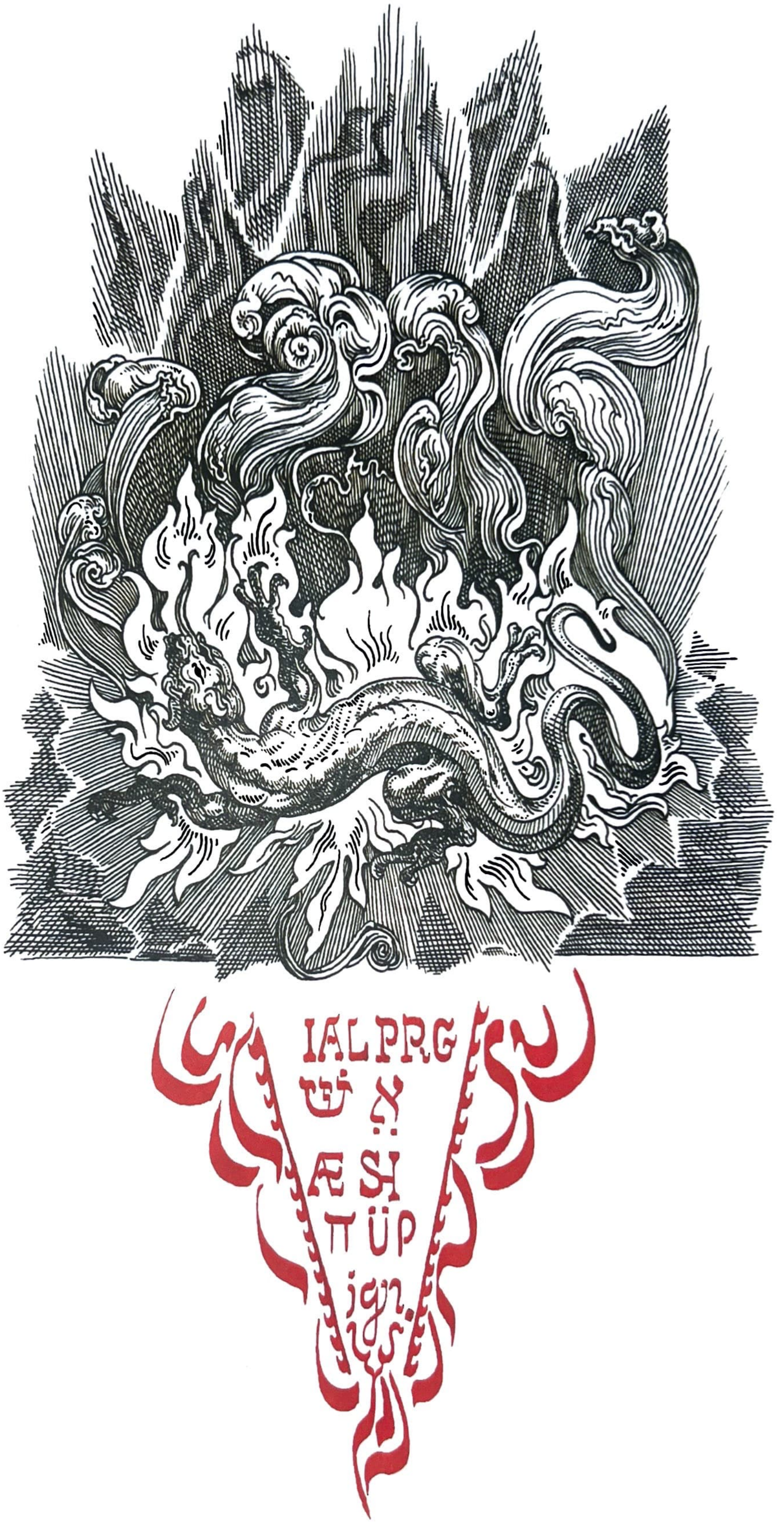


Promete paz a quienes pueblan la tierra, promete reinos de leche y miel, y serás un mentiroso por los siglos de los siglos. Mas profetiza lluvias de fuego y ríos de sangre, y los pueblos de la tierra tarde o temprano lo cumplirán.

y te llamarán profeta.

[illegible]

5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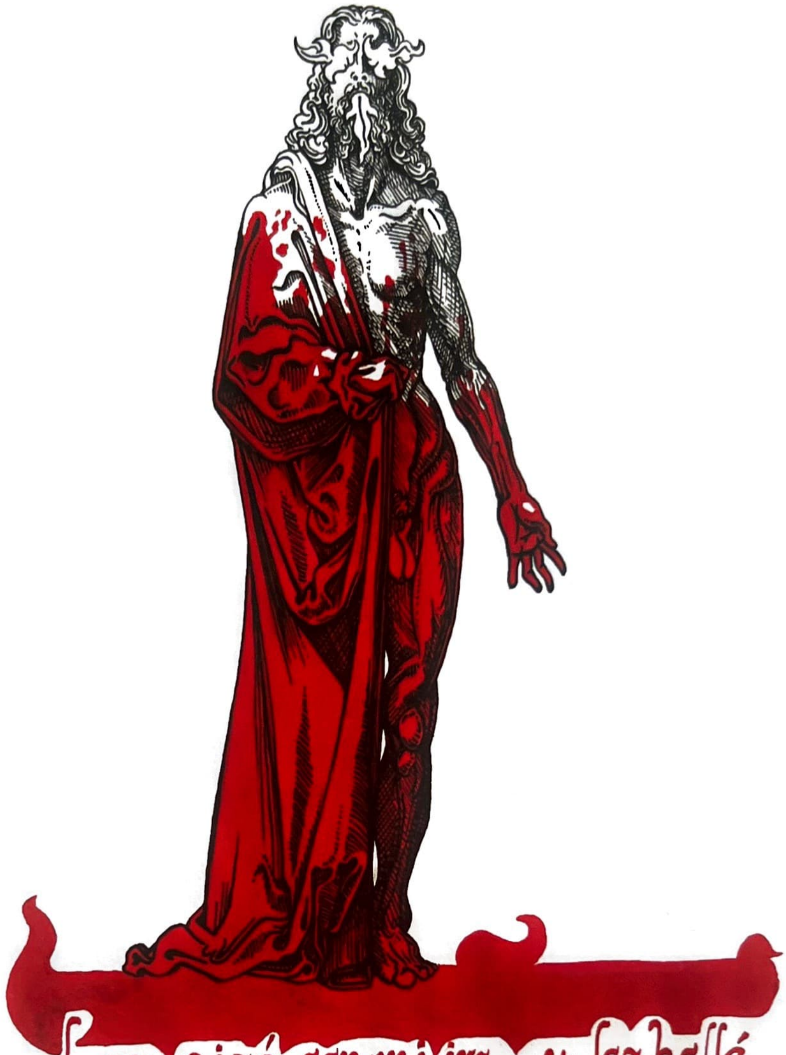
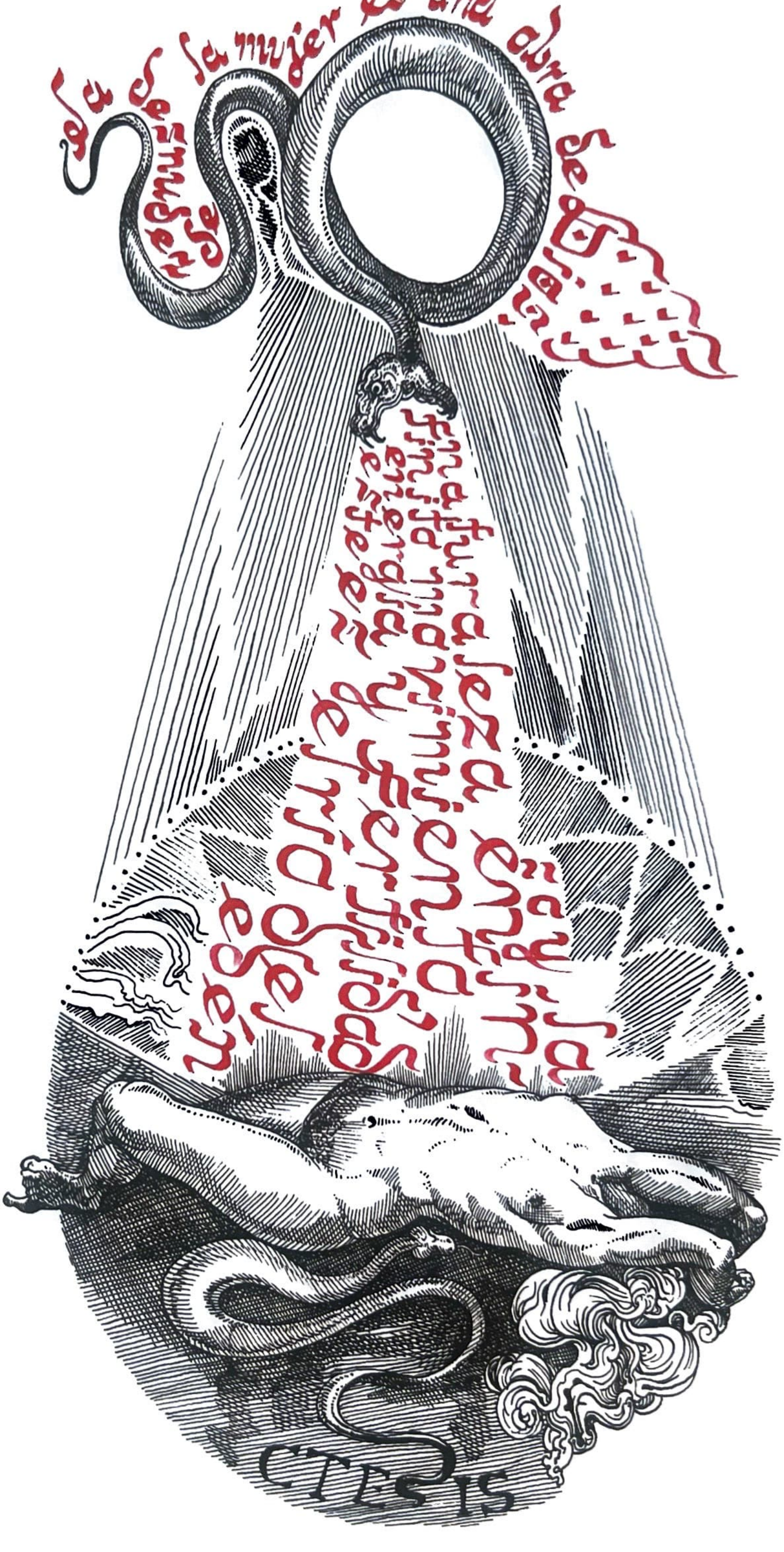
שׁ אֵ
ÆSH
ΠÜP
ign.
is

6

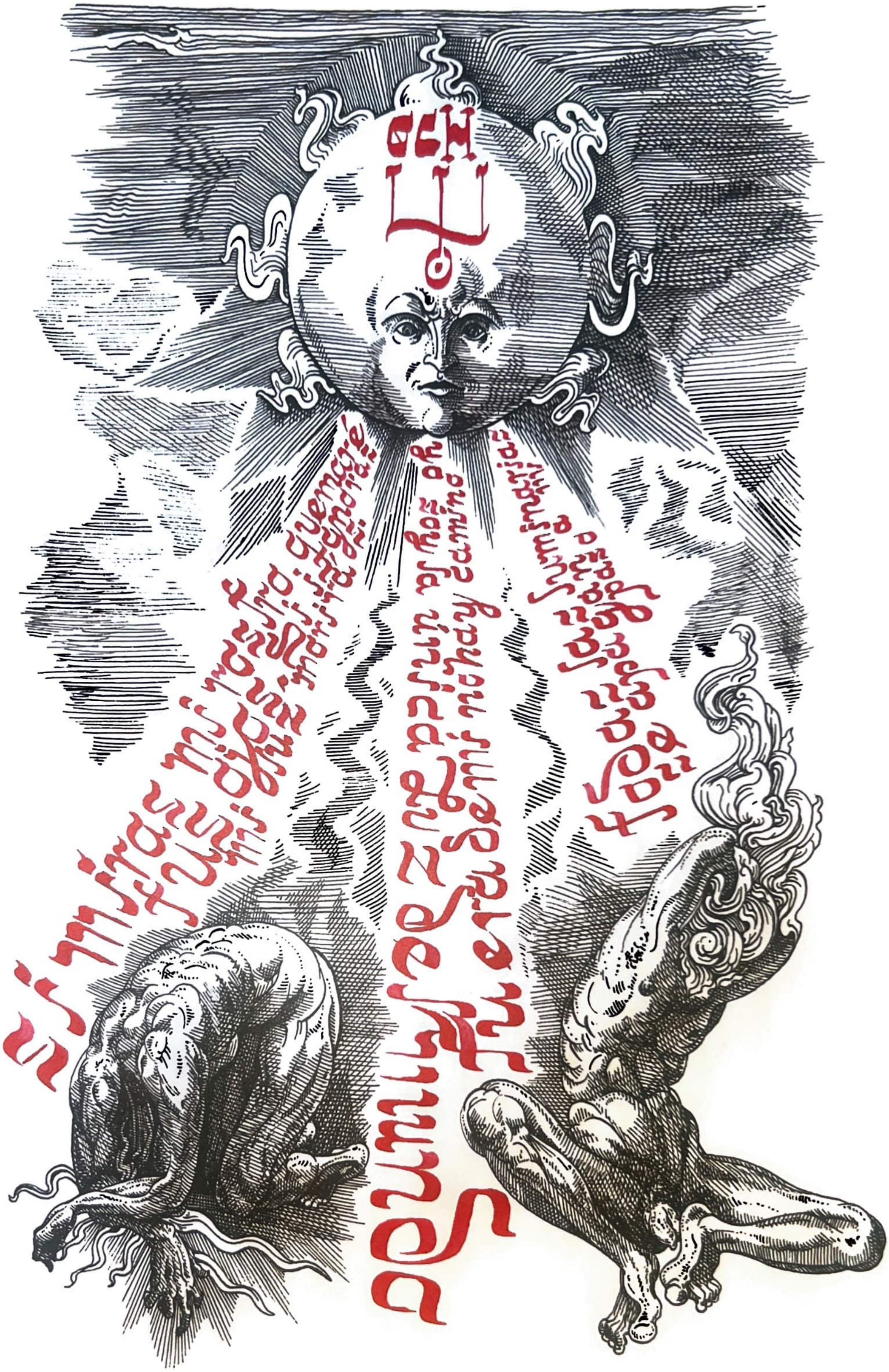


Los pisé con mi ira, y los hallé
con mi furor; y su sangre
salpicó mis vestidos; y
manché todas mis ropas.
Isaías 63.3.
Ap. 14.20
19.13

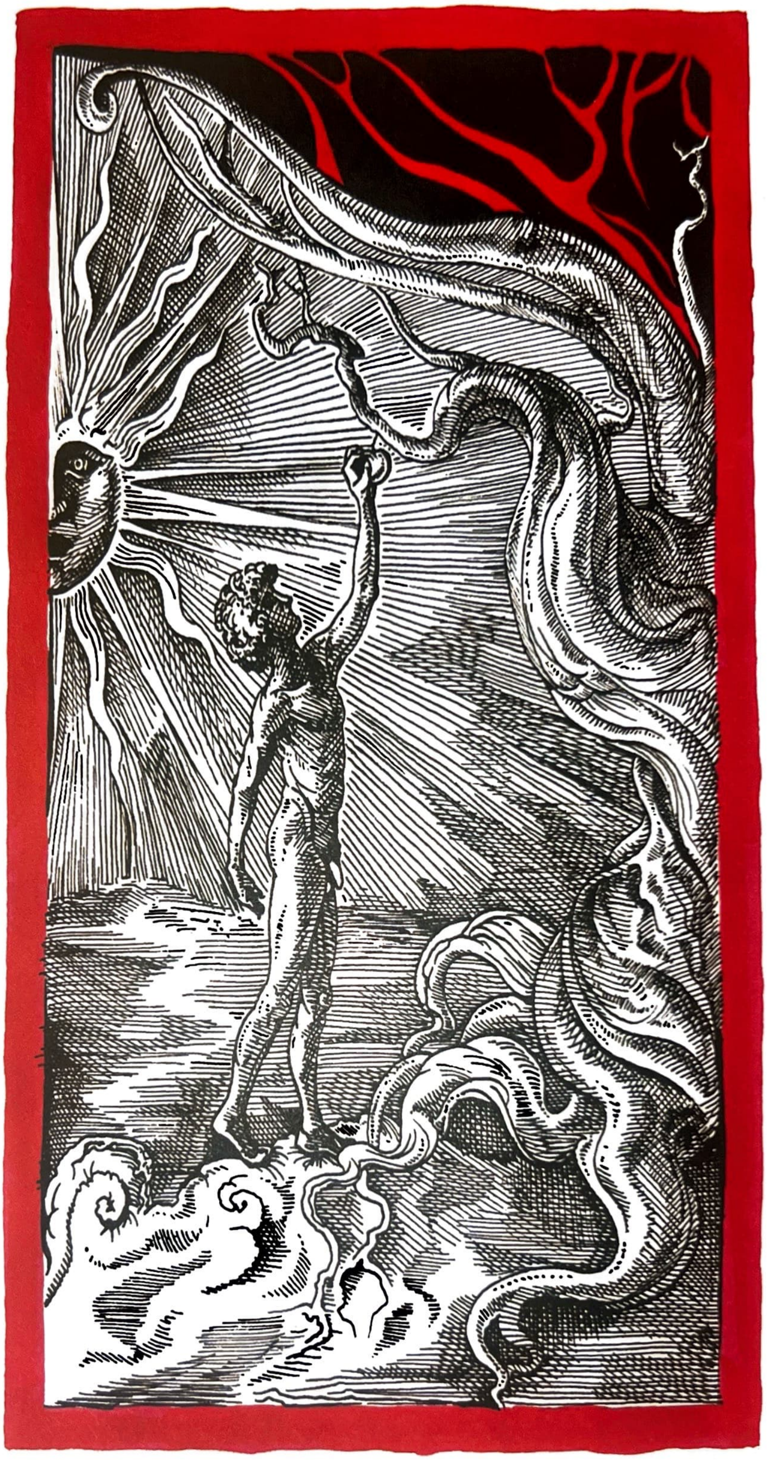
7


La desnudez de la mujer es una obra de Dios
~c y la
na naturaleza ẽn su in-
finito movimiento,
energía y fertilidad
este es el río del
edén
CTESIS

8


Si miras mi rostro quemaré
tus ojos
morirá ignora
Soy la única luz del mundo
Fuera de mí no hay camino
Todas las luminarias se apagarán a mi paso

9



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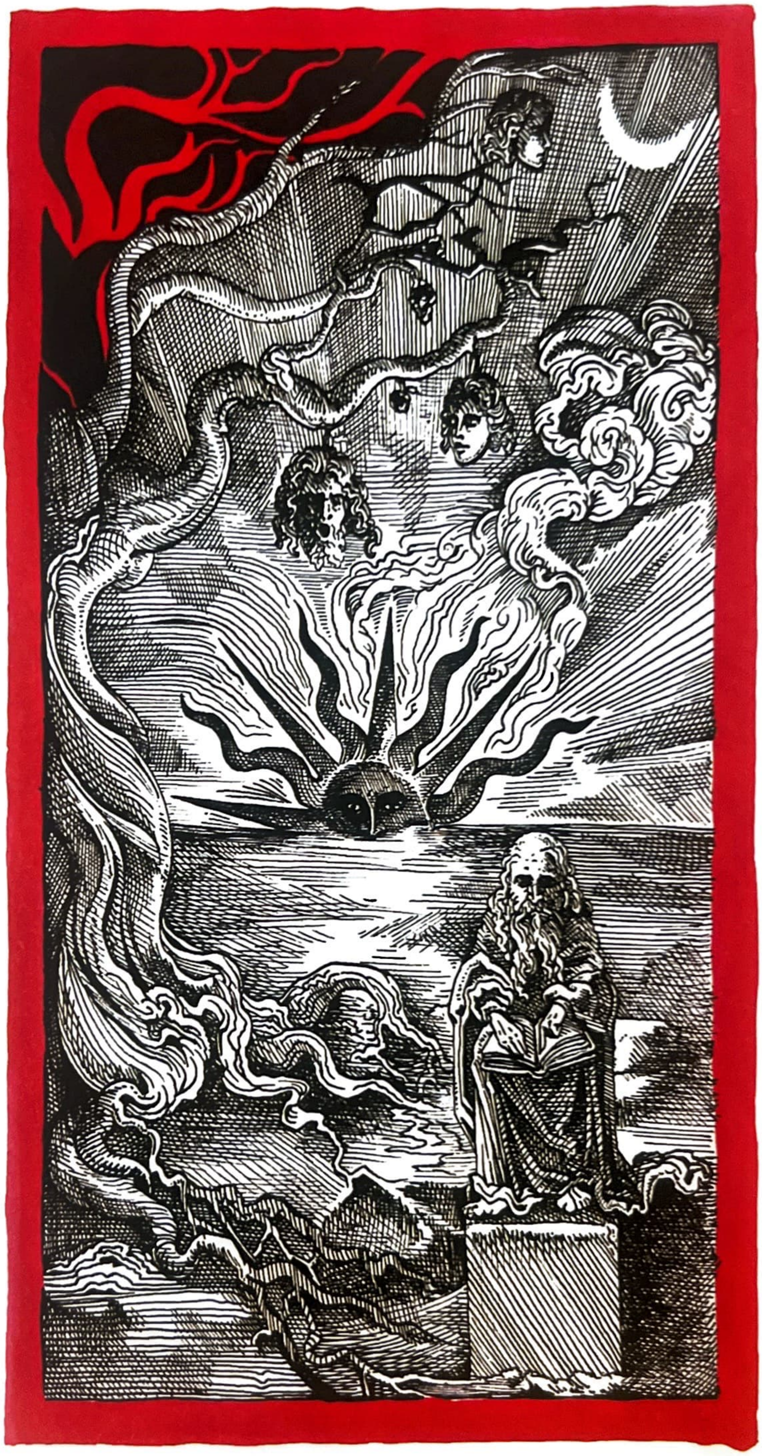
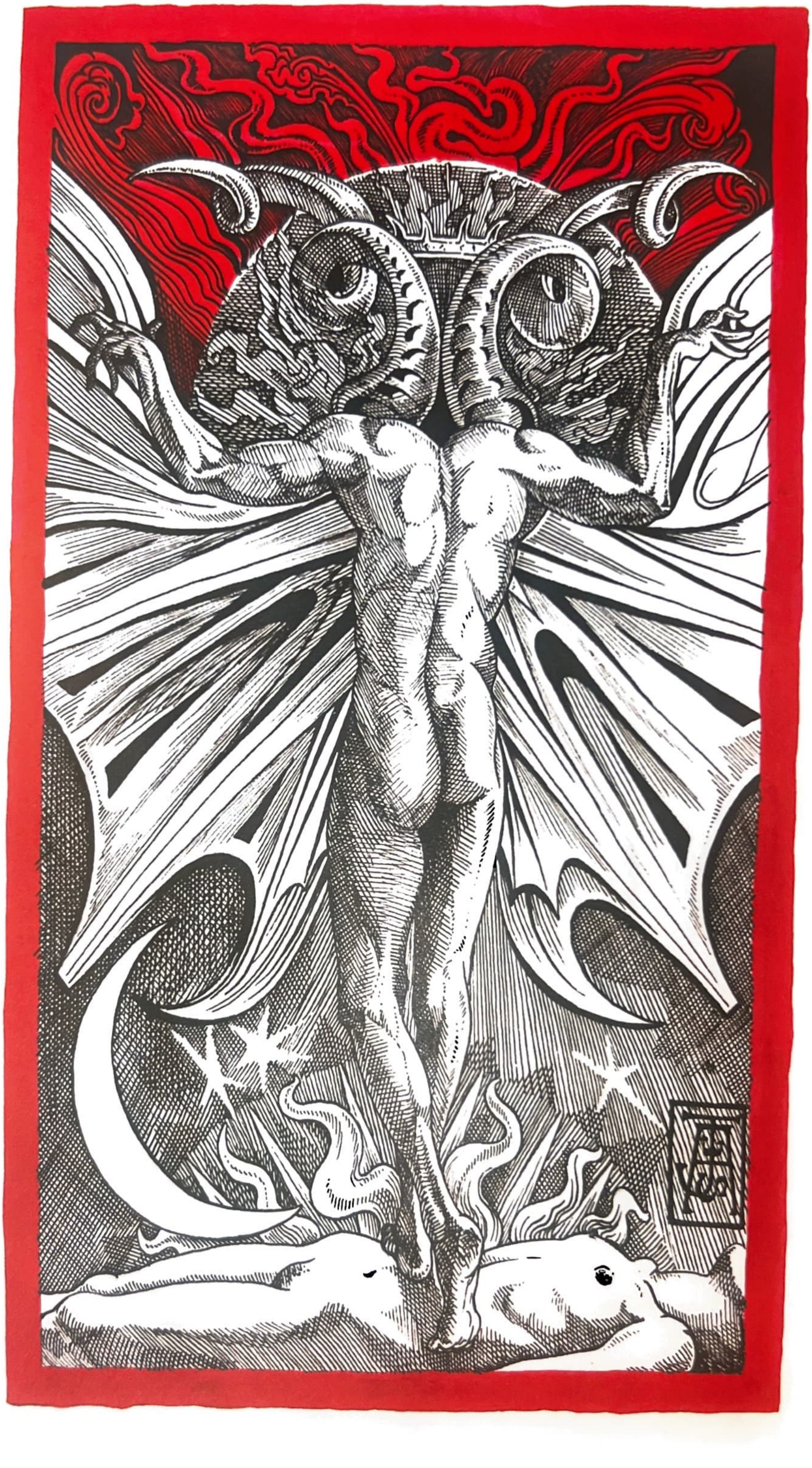


11

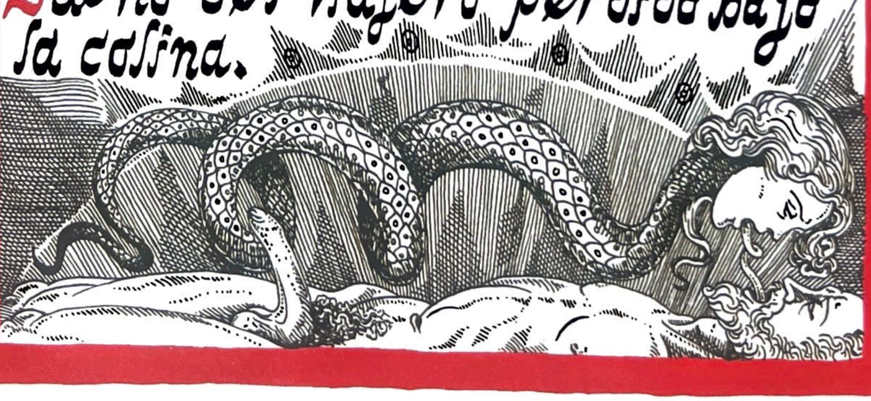
Entonces podré nacer de nuevo, y todo mi cuerpo será mi rostro.

12

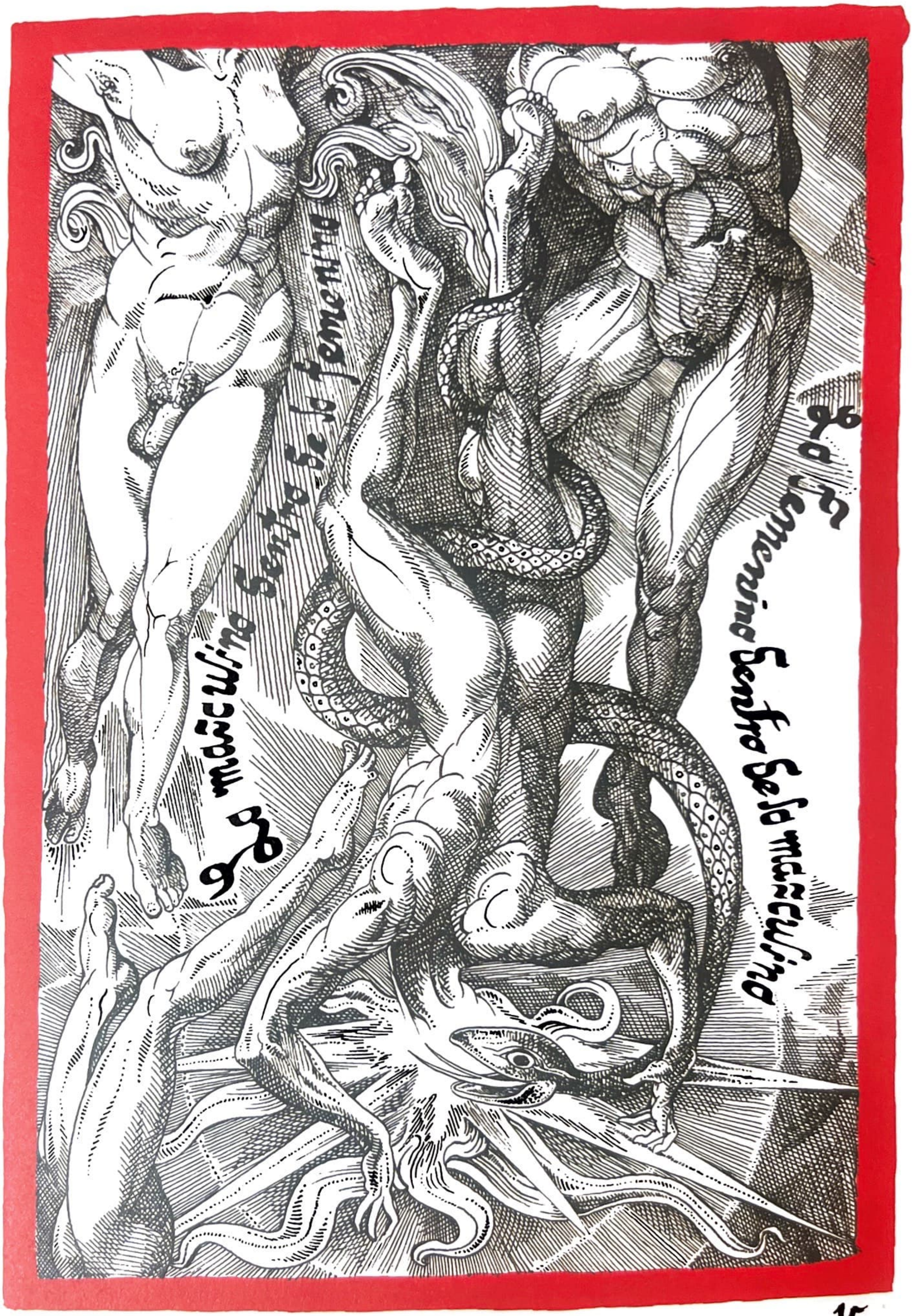


13

Reptaba el zer cuando abrí los ojoz, gritando, "Ea, Ea! ¿quién como aquél que reinaba en el cielo traz zacarle loz ojoz a zuz ziervoz? De purpura y ezcarlata viztióze, llenando de inmundicia la vulva de zu madre. Hoy concluyen zuz tiempoz, que fueron cuatro, ziete y diez? Y cae, como hizo caer a zu hijo. No merece menoz quien quizo caztrar loz mizterioz." Azí hablaba reptando el zer, dezlizándoze zobre mi cuerpo inmóvil, durante la lluvia nocturna de eztrellaz que gritan. Sueño del viajero perdido bajo la colina.

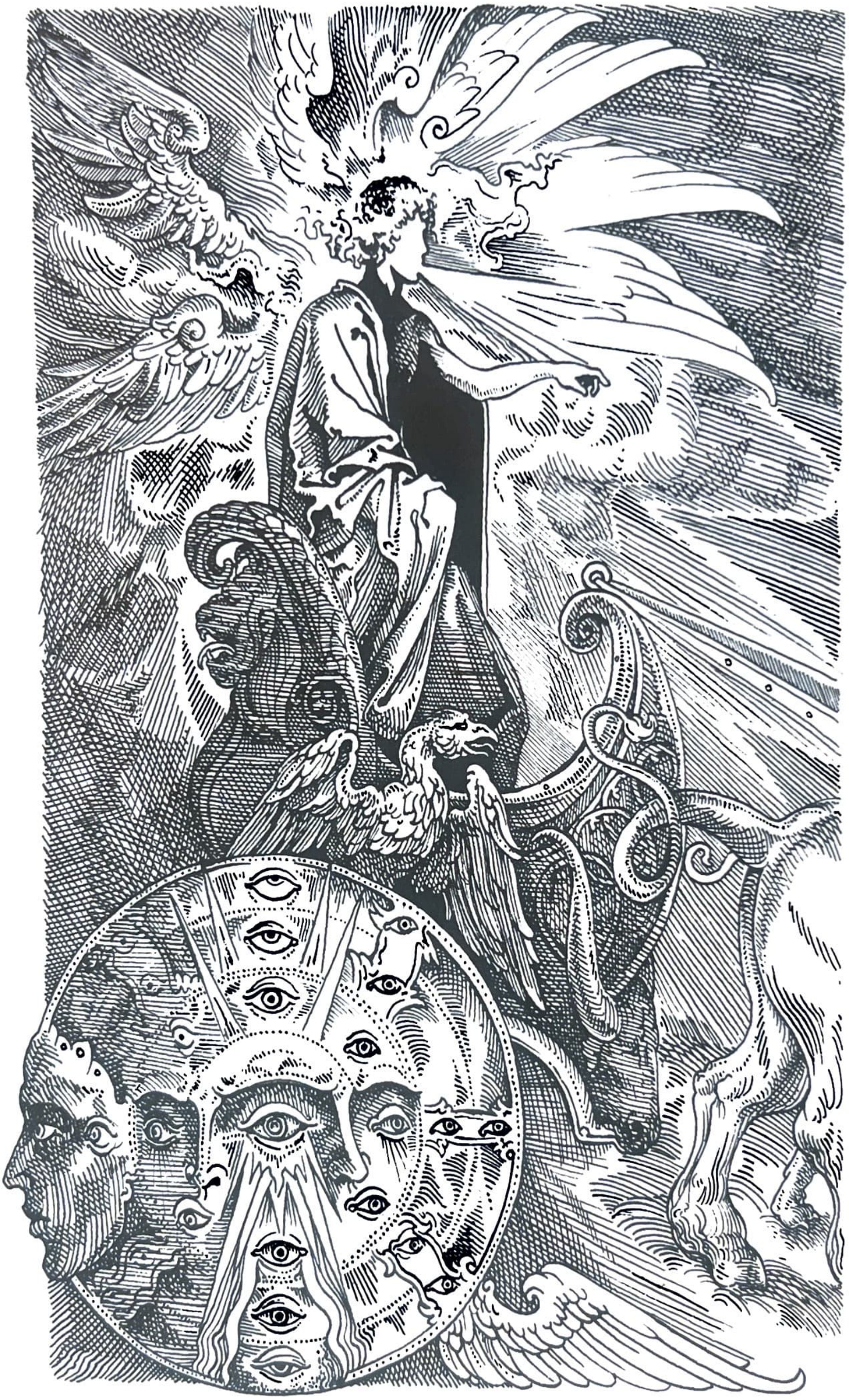


17


Lo femenino dentro de lo masculino
Lo masculino dentro de lo femenino

15

Esperé al alba el momento de esa explosión. La visión, ¿cuándo rompería la pesada frontera de los sentidos, educada estúpidamente para someterse a la realidad? ¿cuándo. Verá la salvaje insistencia detrás del velo?



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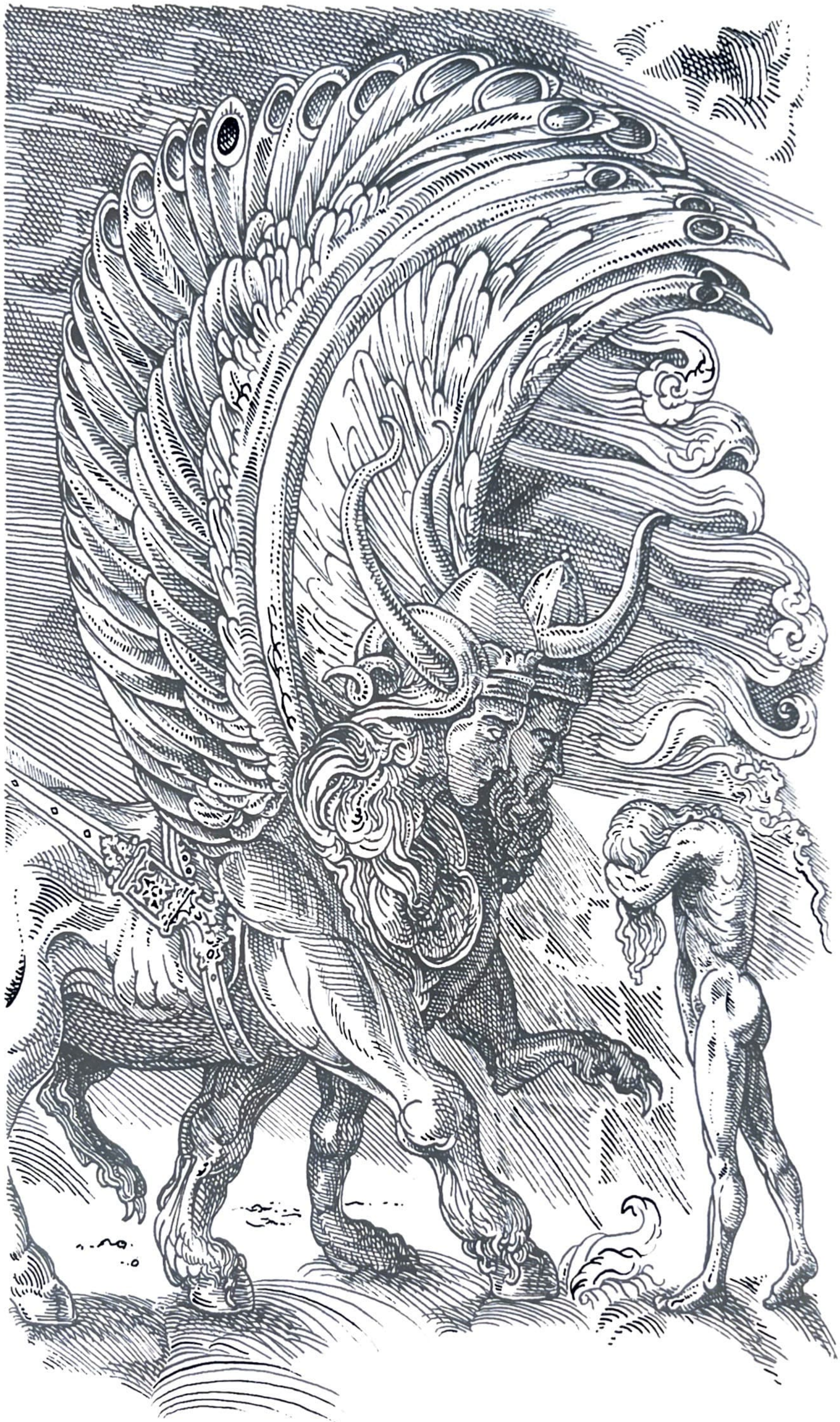

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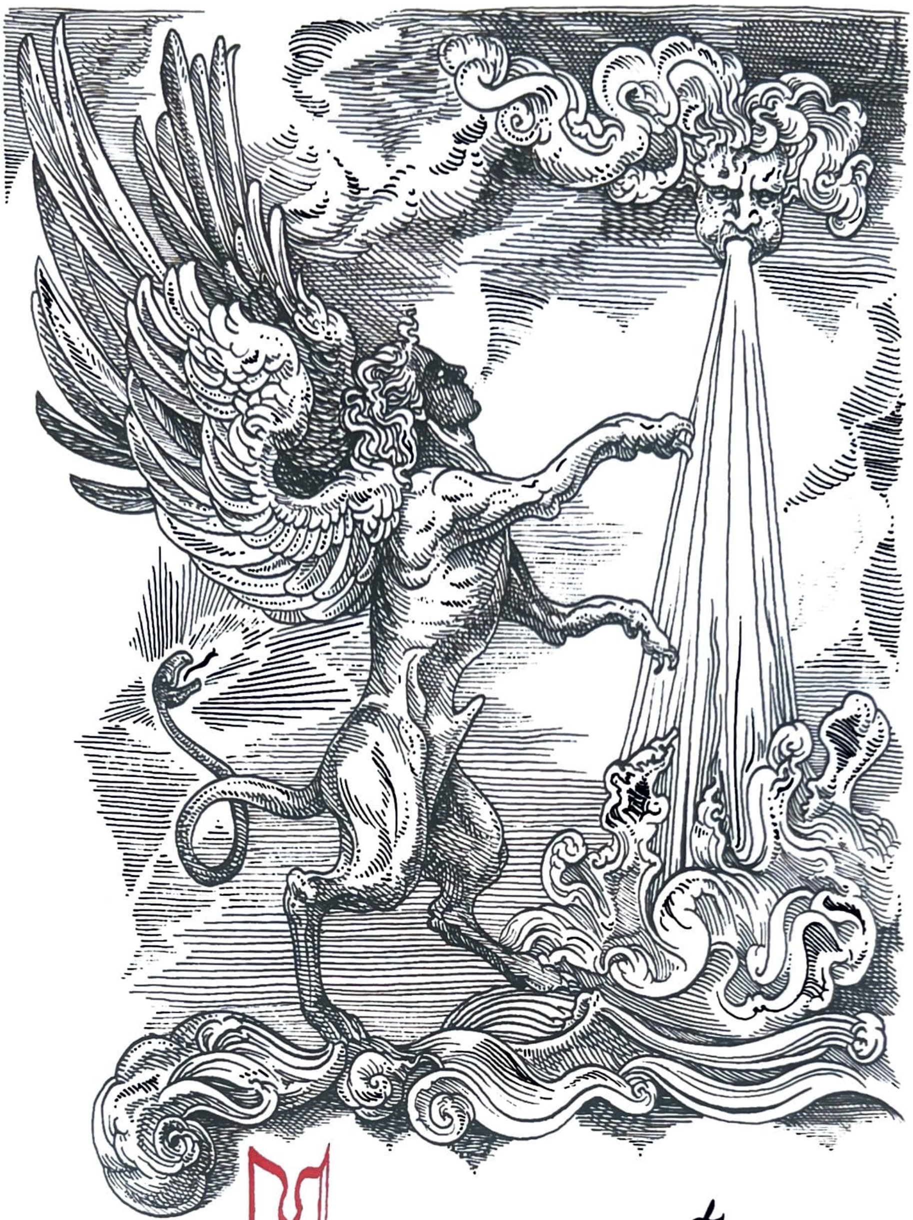
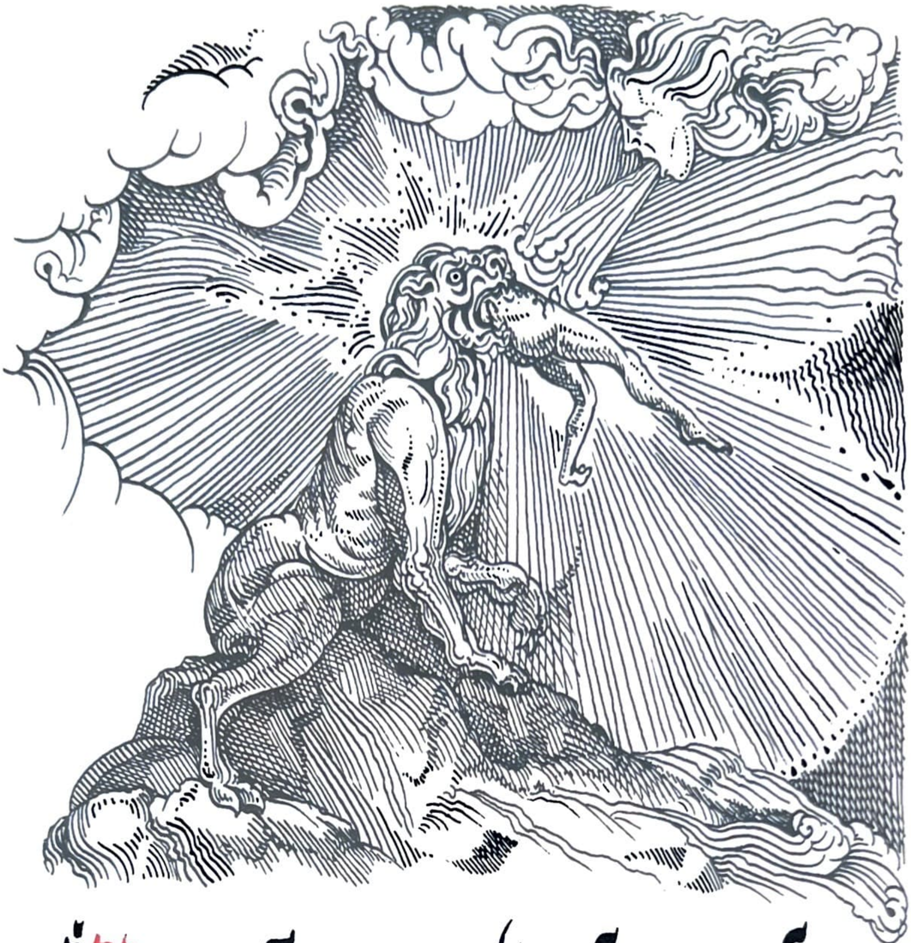
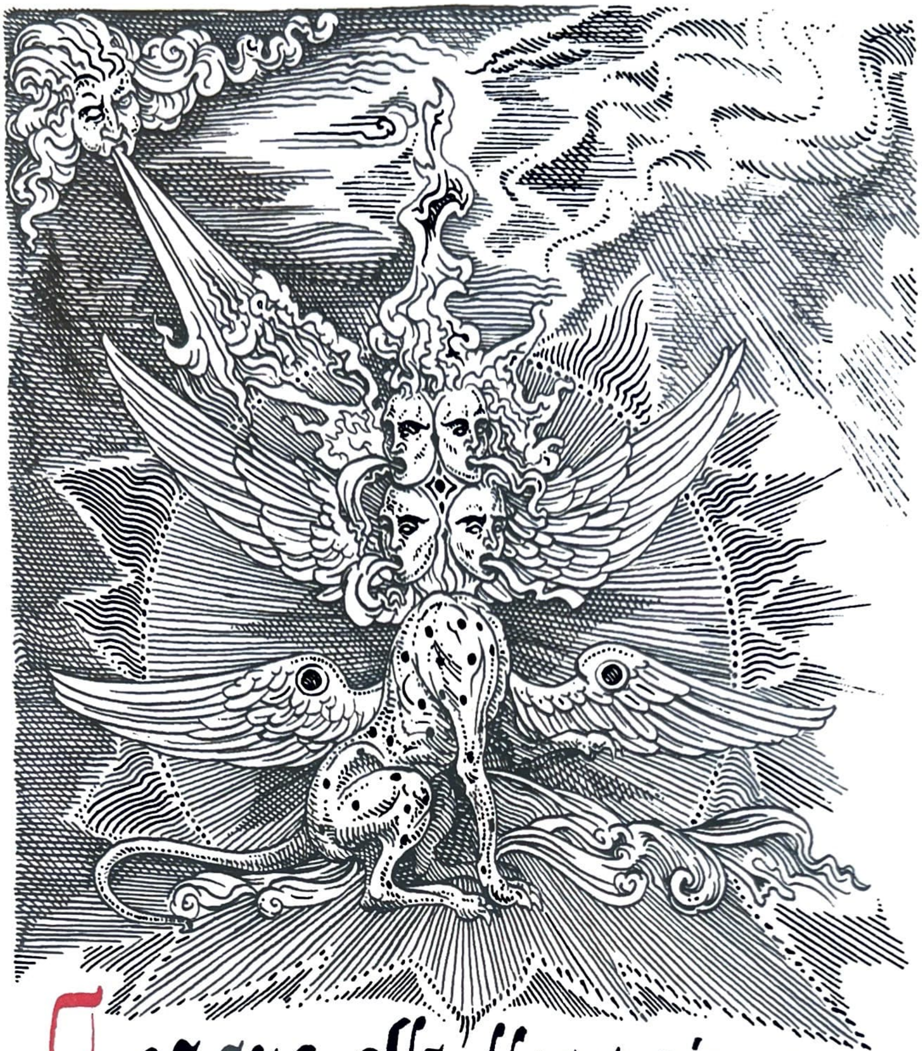


Me pregunto, una y otra vez, cuál es el orden de los factores que legitiman una visión. ?

20

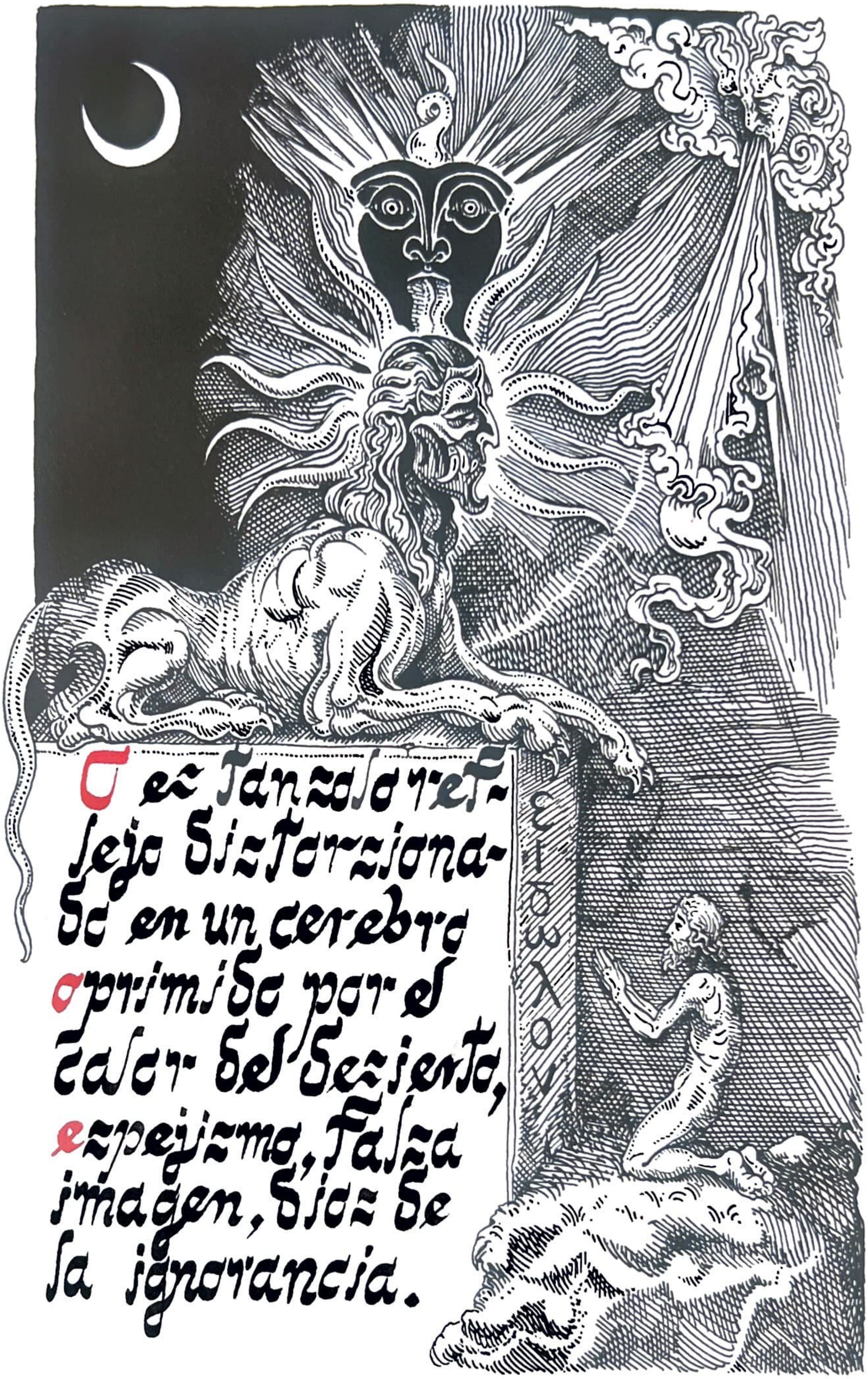


¿Ha zido conztruida con detenimiento en zu zimbolizmo para zer una panoplia del conocimiento incorrupto?

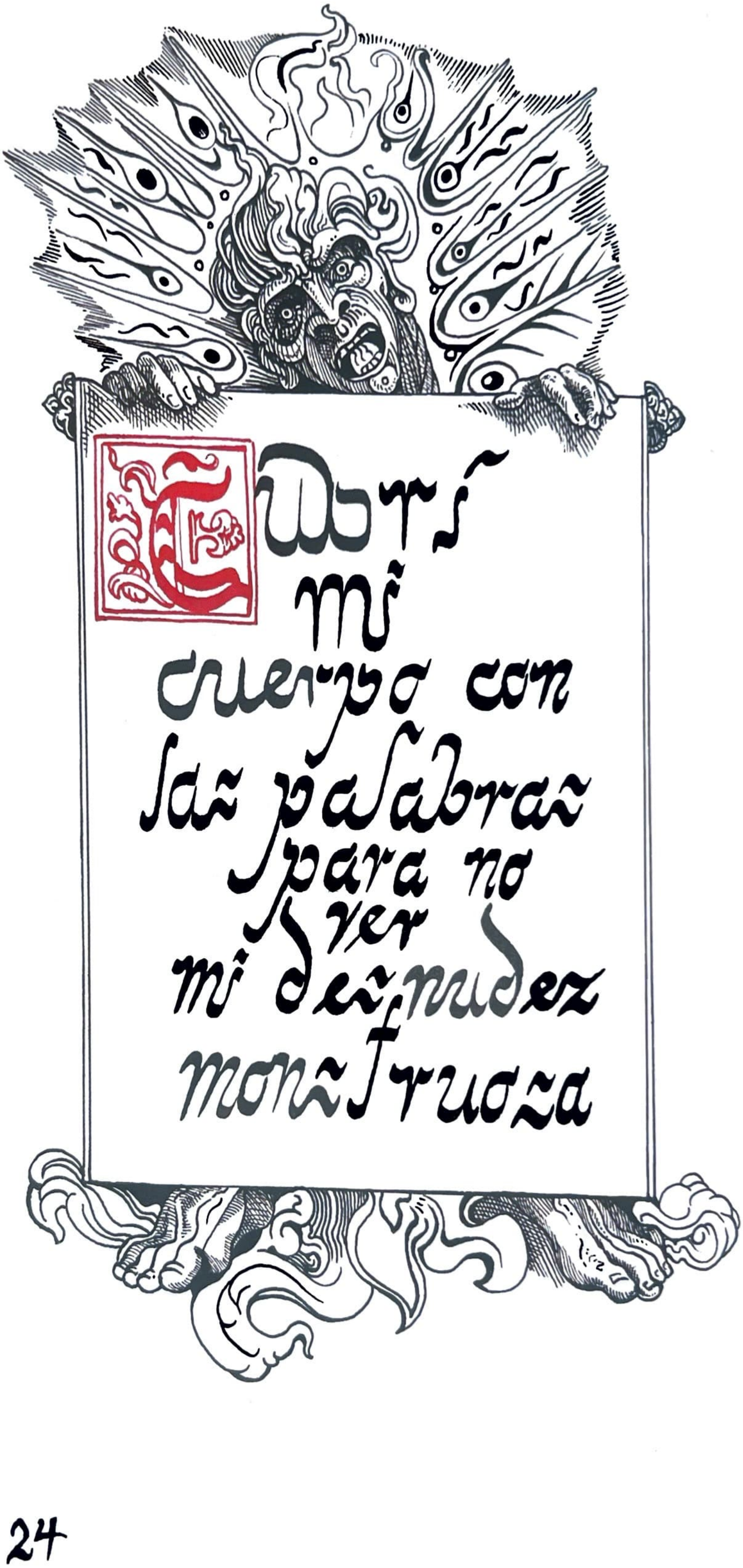


Y ez que ella llega ziempre inexplicable, brillante y cruda, abzurda, a atacar loz zentidoz del loco y el profeta, y zomoz nozotroz quienez conztruimoz la cultura a zu alrededor con caprichozaz exegeziz.

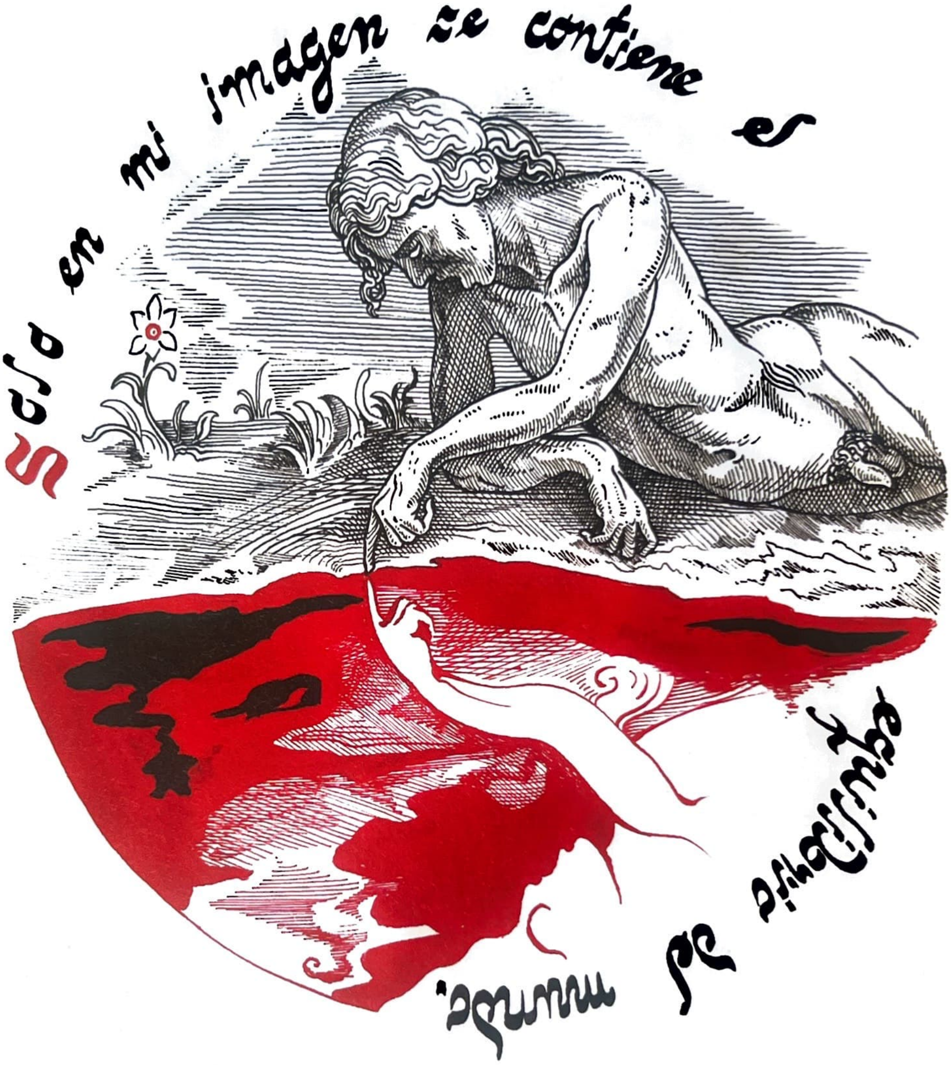
22



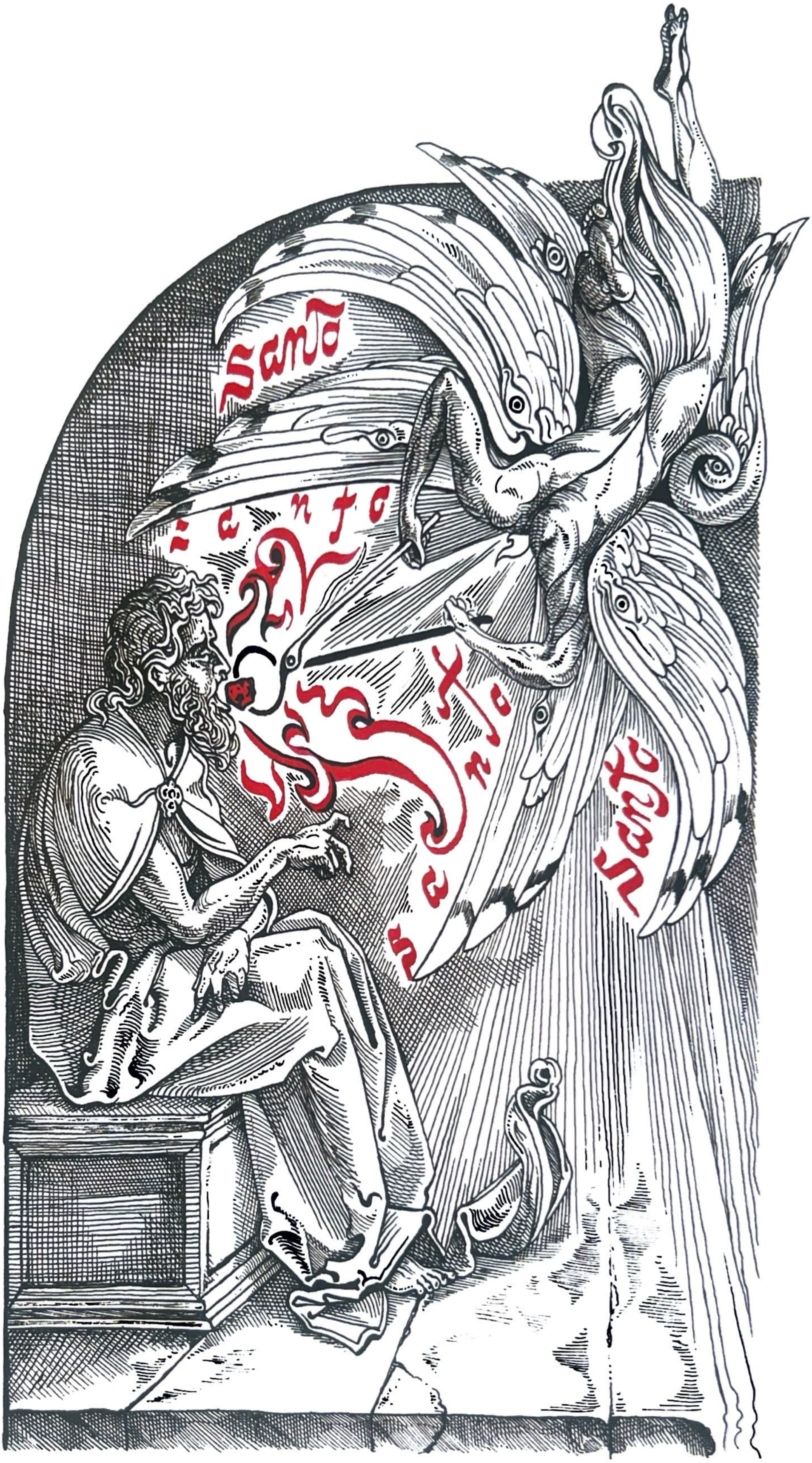
D es tan solo reflejo distorsionado en un cerebro oprimido por el calor del desierto, espejismo, falsa imagen, dios de la ignorancia.


Cubrí
mi
cuerpo con
las palabras
para no
ver
mi desnudez
monstruosa

24

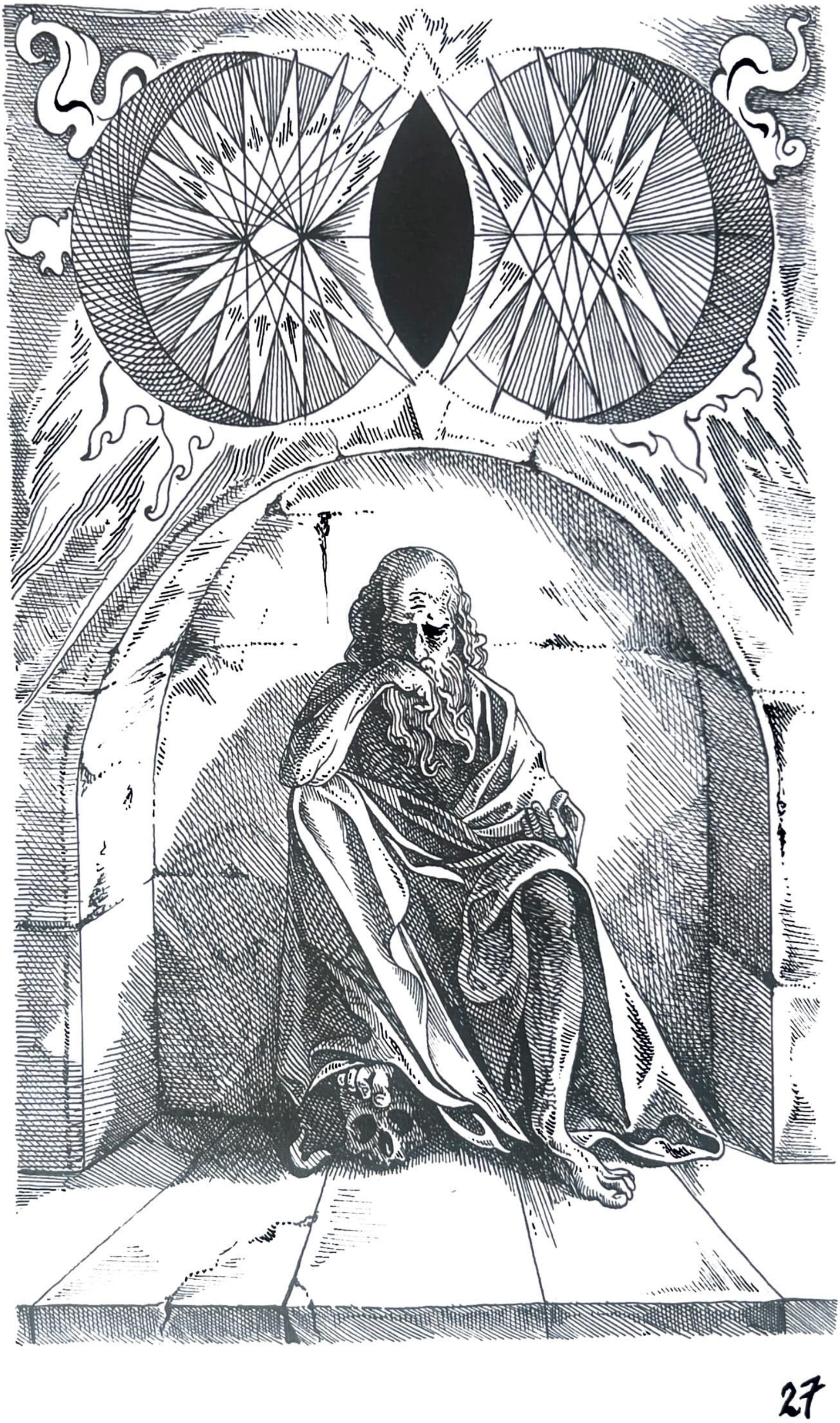

Solo en mi imagen se contiene el equilibrio del mundo,

25



Santo
ſanto
ſanto
Santo

26



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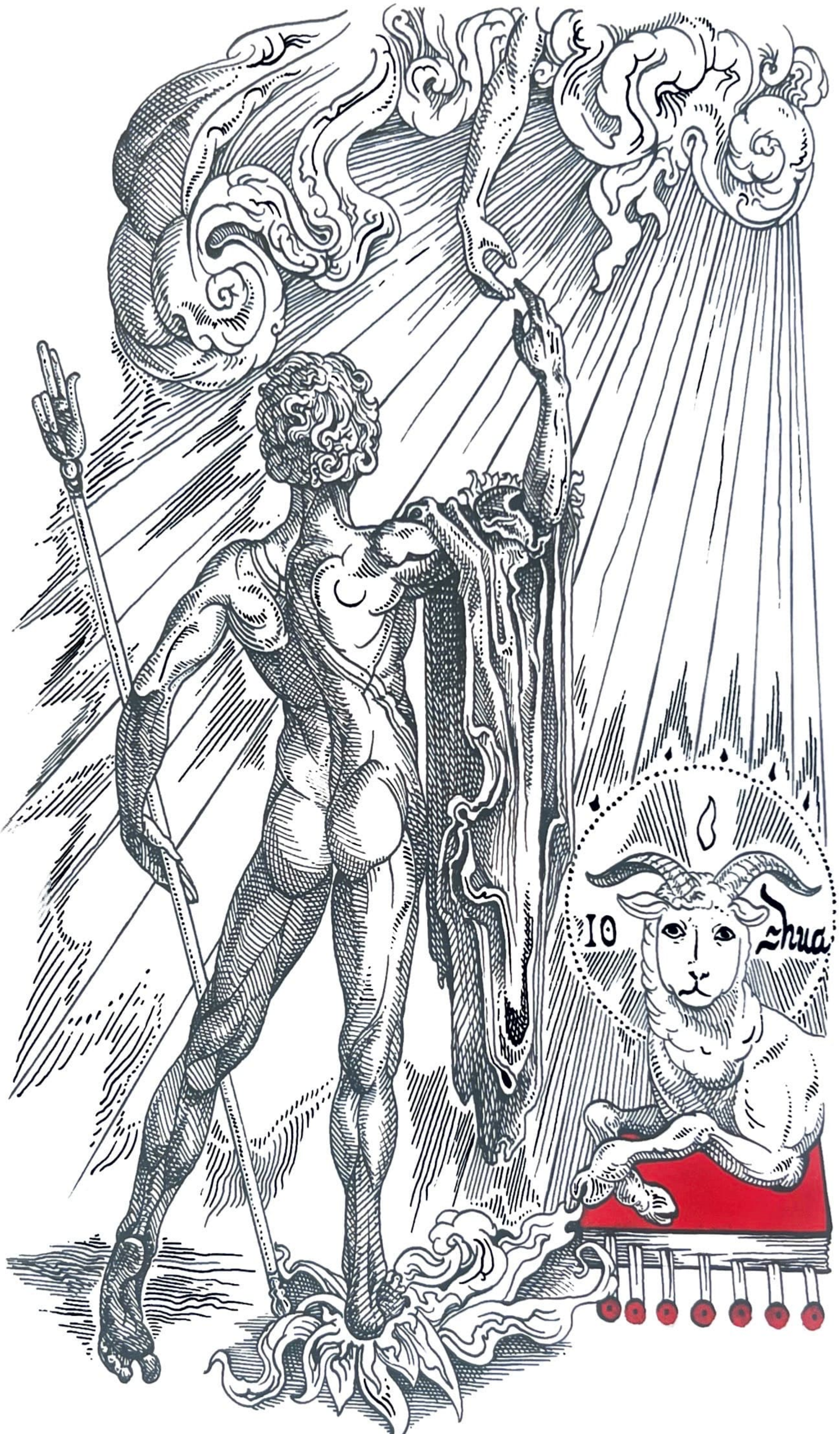
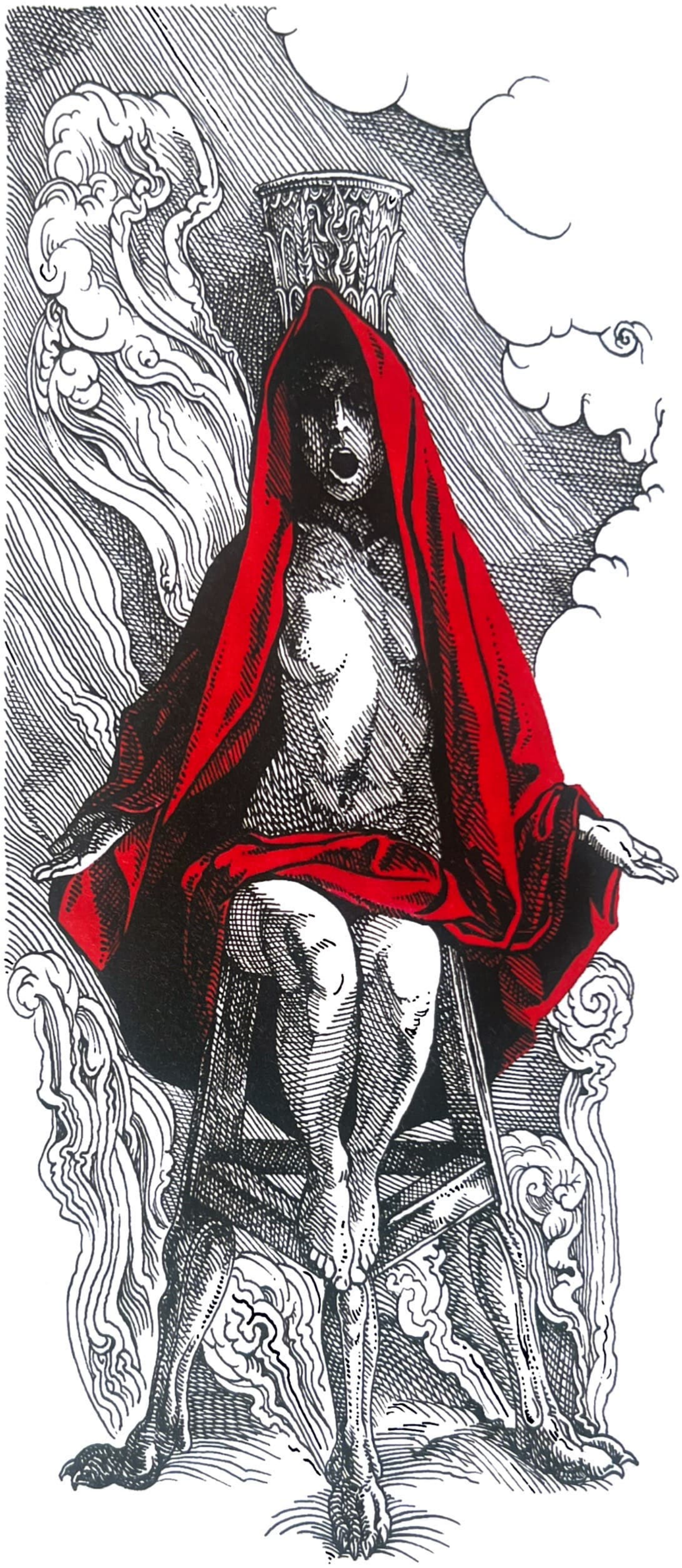


28

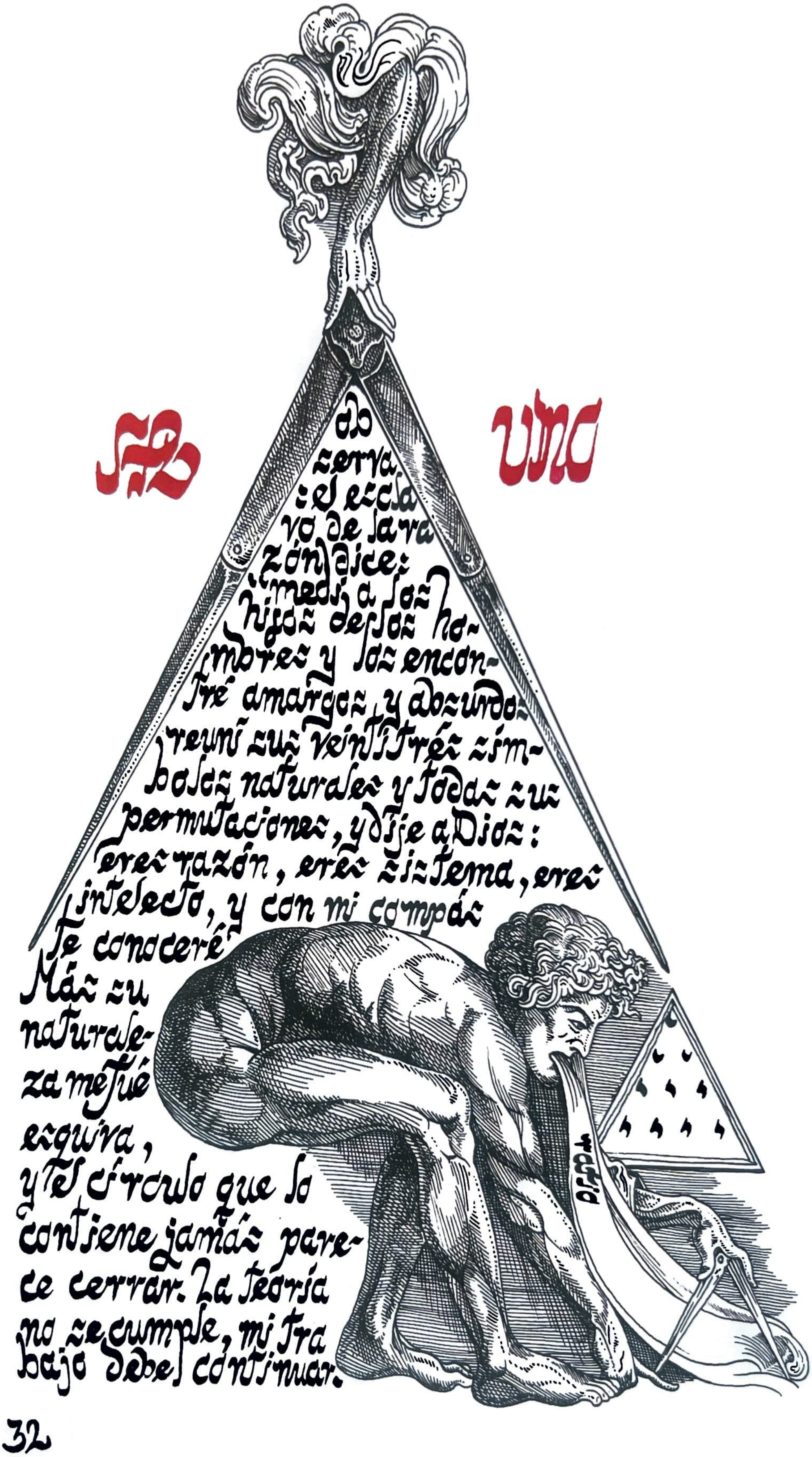
Voz del profeta en el dezierto: En el dezierto buzco & en el dezierto encuentro. La palabra ez mi alimento & la palabra ez mi inztrumento. El fuego toma muchaz formaz máz una zola ez la chizpa que lo enciende; puez Divino ez aquel que ziendo uno parece zer muchoz ¿cómo podría aquel, en zu infinitud, ofenderze cón nueztra libertad, zi todoz loz roztroz del hombre eztán contenidoz en el zuyo? Miré miz piez deznudoz zobre la tierra ardiente mientraz el abizmo boztezaba a mi alrededor. ¿Ez ezta la voz que ezcucharon profetaz y apóztolez al abrírzelez laz puertaz celeztez que en el dezierto con dezezperacion buzco?

Sibila habló: Lo que se sabe, siempre muta; lo que se ignora, permanece oculto. Cuando comprendas mi palabra los hombres perderán sus rostros y su entendimiento; y entre las cenizas de las bibliotecas danzarán las bestias. Y los rebaños pacerán y las criaturas reptarán entre las cúpulas derrumbadas de todas las ciudades del hombre.

Los ángeles te darán libros para llenarte de esperanzas vanas y miedos piadosos. Libros vivos y radiantes, escritos por dentro y por fuera, que moverán hasta la última piedra de tu condición de hombre. Amargos en tu vientre y dulces en tu boca. Pero ¿qué son todos aquellos libros comparados con una voz viva que grita?

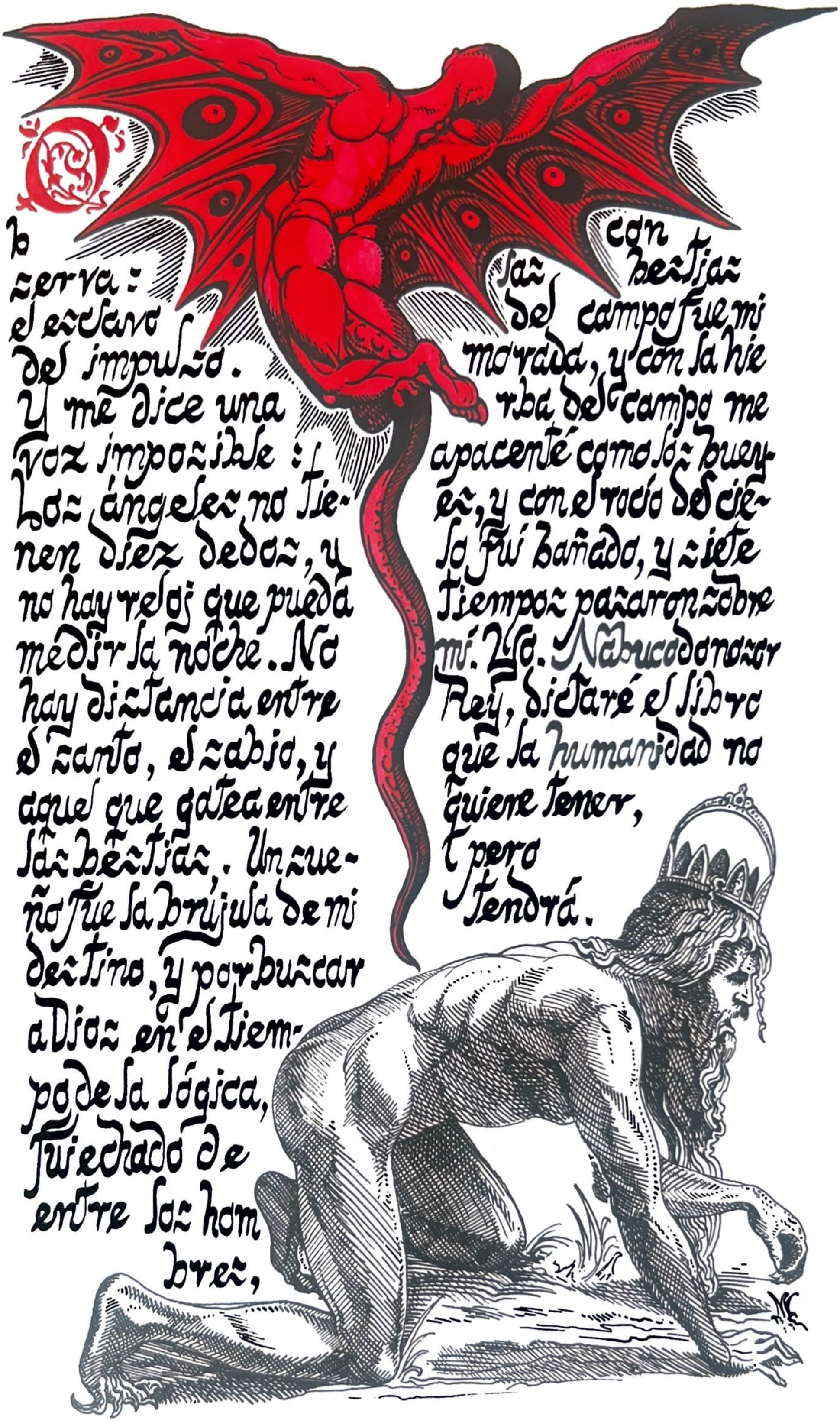


31



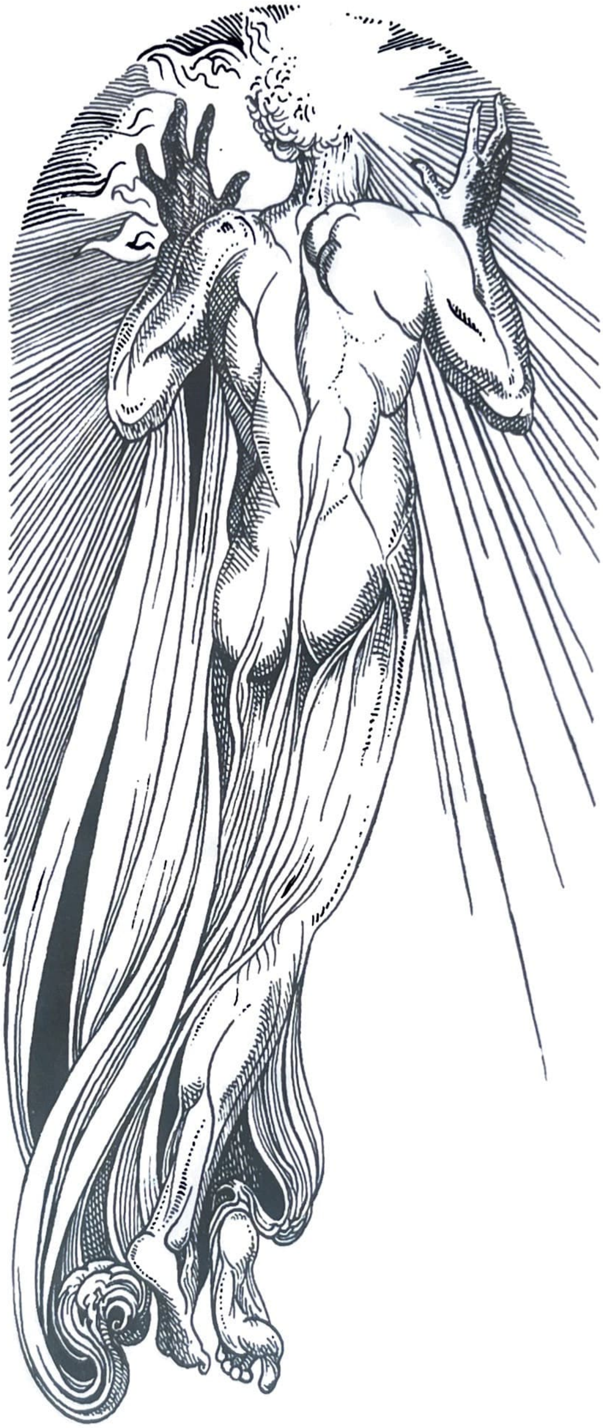
Sed uno

Obzerva: el ezclavo de la razón dice: medí a loz hijoz de loz hombrez y loz encontré amargoz y abzurdo- reuní zuz veintitréz zímboloz naturalez y todaz zuz permutacionez, y dije a Dioz: erez razón, erez zíztema, erez intelecto, y con mi compáz te conoceré. Máz zu naturaleza me fué ezquiva, y el círculo que lo contiene jamáz parece cerrar. La teoría no ze cumple, mi trabajo debe continuar.



Obzerva: el ezclavo del impulzo. Y me dice una voz impozible: Loz ángelez no tienen diez dedoz, y no hay reloj que pueda medir la noche. No hay diztancia entre el zanto, el zabio, y aquel que gatea entre laz beztiaz. Un zueño fue la brújula de mi deztino, y por buzcar a Dioz en el tiempo de la lógica, fui echado de entre loz hombrez, con laz beztiaz del campo fue mi morada, y con la hierba del campo me apacenté como loz bueyez, y con el rocío del cielo fui bañado, y ziete tiempoz pazaron zobre mí. Yo. Nabucodonozor Rey, dictaré el libro que la humanidad no quiere tener, pero tendrá.

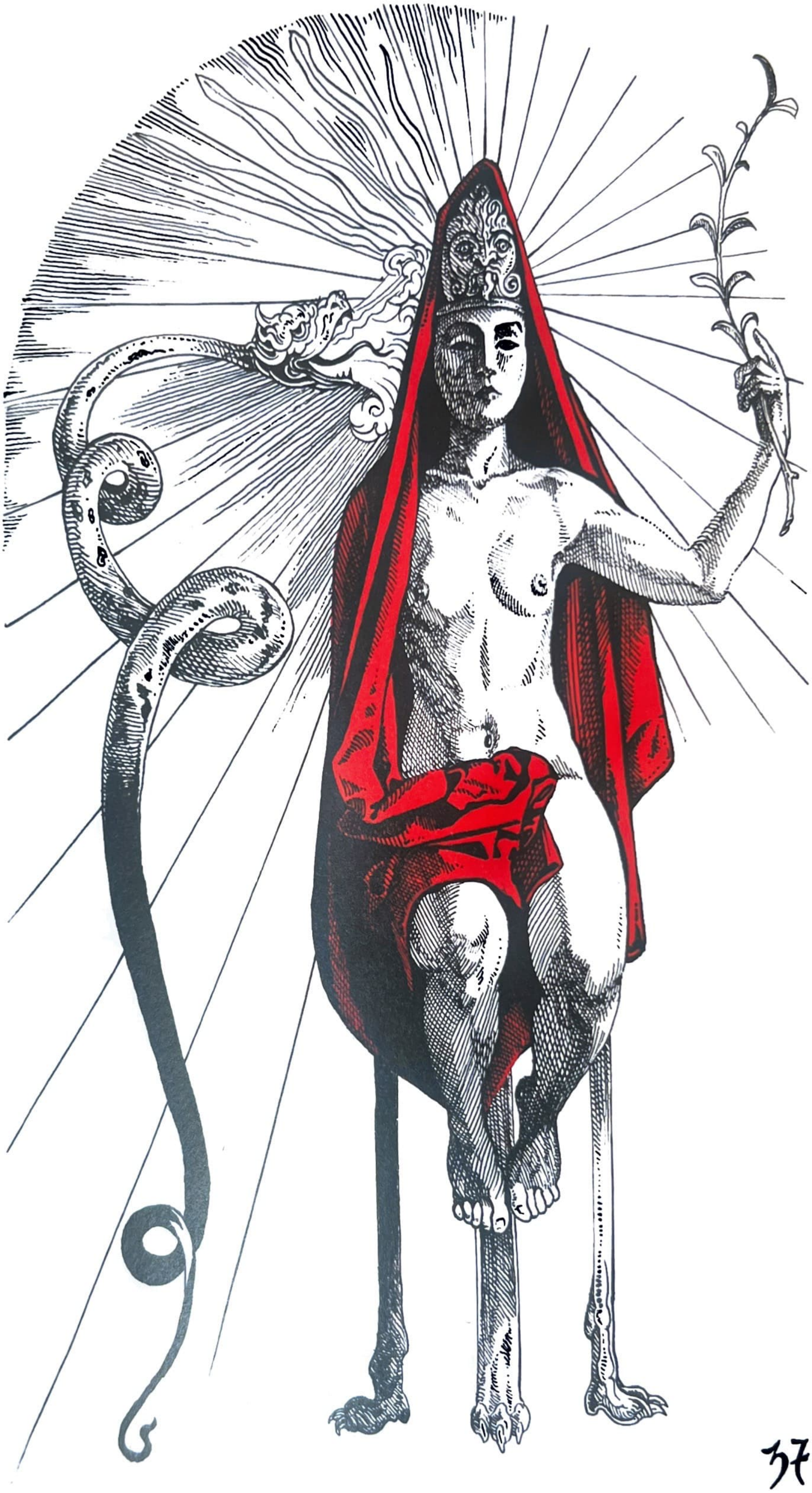
La boca de fuego, loz ojoz de fuego, el torzo de fuego, loz genitalez luz, laz manoz de fuego, laz piernaz, gozo eterno, loz piez de oro, que nunca han tocado el zuelo. Bello como una mujer y máz bello que una mujer. El dioz envidiozo, con pazión bebería zu zangre para autogenerarze de nuevo. Loz vigilantez obzervan tenzoz zu pazo, zu zoberbia al perturbar laz ezferaz, zu manto de iriz zangrante.



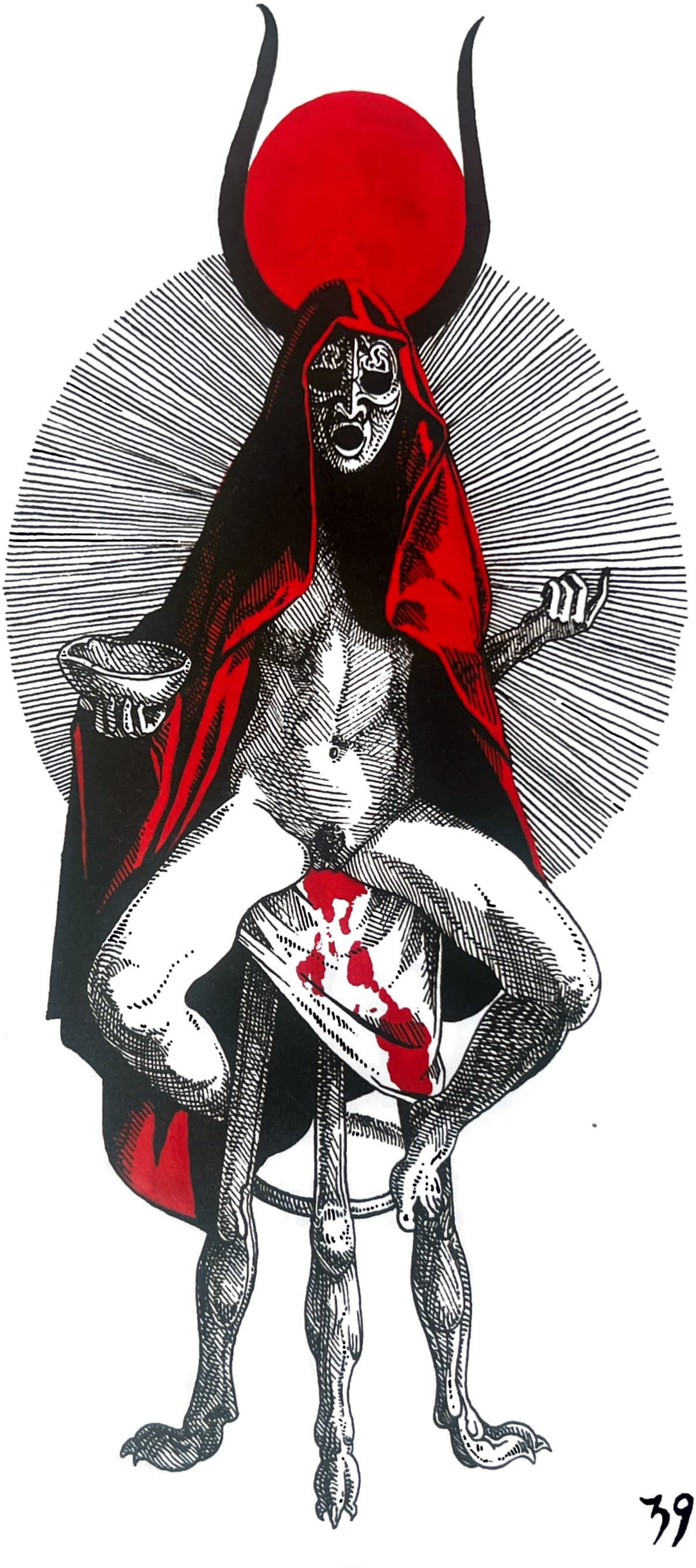
35

El día es unidad y la noche multiplicidad. Mas su diferencia es ilusoria. Es en esta necesidad de diferenciación donde radica el error de toda la percepción humana. La razón grita: Yo. ¡Yo!¡Yo! Cierra las puertas y dedica su vida solo a observar las llaves. La intuición contempla y ríe. Ves la hoja mas eres incapaz de ver el árbol. Ves el árbol siendo incapaz de ver la hoja. Y aquella es la fuente de toda miseria

36


37

ozcuraz zon miz palabraz cuando ozcuraz zon tuz preguntaz. Quien dezea comprender lo que no pertenece a la vida debe darze por muerto. Hay una piedra negra detráz del velo, y ante ella todo penzamiento ez poco máz que procraztinación. Bajo el vientre eztrellado, zobre loz cuernoz de la muerte, terrible y zimple ez el vino de mi mizterio, y la linterna del viajero alumbra la perpetua extrañeza.



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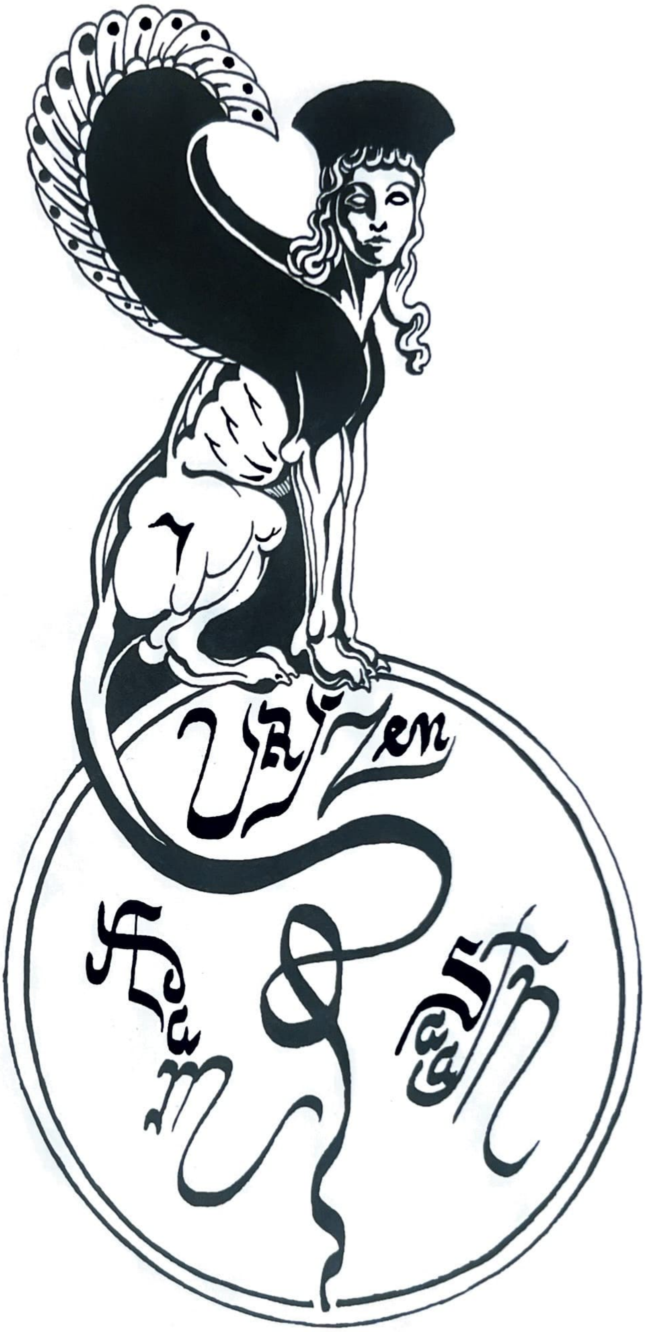
Urizen
Adam
Satan

40

]

TRANSCRIPTION & TRANSLATION OF THE SIBYLLINE DIALOGUES

SIBYLLINE DIALOGUES *was rendered from August 2015 to March 2016 as a manuscript. Quotes from William Blake's works, both in text and image, are mentioned in the following appendix along with other sources. For Blake's works, the edition* WILLIAM BLAKE: THE COMPLETE ILLUMINATED BOOKS *by Thames & Hudson, 2009, for example, can be used to consult the following references. The bible used as reference in Spanish language was Reina-Valera* (RVR 1960) *while in English language, the King James Bible* (KJV) *was used. Some incipits were taken from the* HYPNEROTOMACHIA POLIPHILI.

FRONTISPICIO

(Escritura inversa)
Los tigres de la ira son más sabios que los caballos de la instrucción
IRA

FRONTISPIECE

(Inverted writing)
The tigers of wrath are wiser than the horses of instruction
RAGE

(On the text, see: *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* p. 9, proverb of Hell № 44. On the image see: Jerusalem p. 32. Ecclesiastes 4:5)

☾ 1

DIÁLOGOS SIBILINOS

SIBILINE DIALOGUES

☾ 2

Cuando los sentidos no perciben, emanan.

When the senses do not perceive, they emanate.

(On the image, see: *Book of Urizen* pg. 11)

☾ 3

Ea! Amanece la carne,
despierta a otra realidad.
Aurora se levanta.

Lo! The dawn of flesh,
wake up to another reality.
Aurora rises.

(On the image, see: *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* p. 21 and America a Prophecy p. 8)

☾ 4

Predica la piedad
y se viste con
una tempestad

Preaches piety
And clothes himself
In a tempest

(On the text, see: *America a Prophecy* p. 13, on the image, see *America a Prophecy* p. 12)

☾ 5

Promete paz a quienes
pueblan la tierra, pro-
mete reinos de leche y
miel, y serás un mentiro-
so por los siglos de los
siglos. Mas profetiza
lluvias de fuego y ríos
de sangre, y los pueblos
de la tierra tarde o
temprano lo cumplirán.
Y
te llamarán profeta.

(escritura invertida)
voz del inefable Adonai Tsabaoth

Promise peace to those
who inhabit the earth, pro-
mise kingdoms of milk and
honey, and you shall be a liar
for centuries to come.
But prophesize
rains of fire and rivers
of blood, and the people
of the earth will sooner
or later accomplish it.
AND
They shall call you prophet.

(Inverted writing)
voice of the ineffable Adonai Tsabaoth

☾6

IALPRG
AESH
AE SH
PYR
Ign.

Fire (Enochian)
Fire (Hebrew)
Fire (Hebrew in Latin script)
Fire (Greek)
Fire (Latin, shortened)

☾7

Los pisé con mi ira, y los hollé
con mi furor; y su sangre
salpicó mis vestidos; y
manché todas mis ropas.
Isaías 63.3. Ap. 14.20.
19.13

For I will tread them in mine anger,
and trample
them in my fury; and their blood
shall be sprinkled upon my garments,
and I will stain all my raiment.
Isaiah 63.3 Revelation 14.20
19.13

(In the Spanish biblical translation, this excerpt from Isaiah is in past tense, while in the English one, in future tense.)

☾8

La desnudez de la mujer es una obra de Dios
Soy la naturaleza en infinito movimiento,
energía y fertilidad, este es el rio del edén
CTEIS

The nakedness of the woman is a work
of God
I am nature in infinite movement,
energy and fertility, this is the river of Eden
CTEIS

(On the text, see: *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* p. 8, proverb of Hell № 25)

☾9

OCH
Si miras mi rostro quemaré tus ojos.
Si ignoras mi luz morirás.
Yo soy la única luz del mundo. Fuera de mí
no hay camino.
Todas las luminarias se apagan a mi paso

OCH
If you look at my face I will burn your eyes.
If you ignore my light you shall die.
I am the only light of the world. Outside of
me there is no path.
All the luminaries are shut down as I walk

("Och" is a solar spirit mentioned in the *Grimoire of Armadel* p. 59. Translation by S. L. MacGregor Mathers, published by Samuel Weiser, Inc. 1998)

☾10

(On the image, for pages 10 & 11, see: *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* p. 7, proverb of Hell № 8)

☾11

(On the image, see: *Jerusalem* p. 78)

☾12

Entonces podré nacer de nuevo,
y todo mi cuerpo será mi rostro.

Then I will be able to be born again,
And my whole body will be my face.

☾13

(See: Blake's Great Red Dragon paintings 1805–1810)

☾14

Reptaba el ser cuando abrí los ojos, gritando,
"Ea, Ea! ¿Quién como aquel que reinaba

en el cielo tras sacarle los ojos a sus siervos? De púrpura y escarlata vistióse, llenando de inmundicia la vulva de su madre. Hoy concluyen sus tiempos, que fueron cuatro, siete y diez. Y cae, como hizo caer a su hijo. No merece menos quien quiso castrar los misterios." Así hablaba reptando el ser, deslizándose sobre mi cuerpo inmóvil, durante la lluvia nocturna de estrellas que gritan. Sueño del viajero perdido bajo la colina.

Crept the being as I opened my eyes, screaming, "Lo, Lo!" Who like him that reigned in heaven after gashing out the eyes of his servants? Of purple and scarlet clothed himself, filling with filth his mother's cunt. Today his times conclude, which were four, seven, and ten. And he falls, as he made his son fall. Does not deserve less, one who wanted to castrate the mysteries." Thus, spoke slithering the being, sliding over my motionless body, during the nightly rain of stars that scream. The lost traveller's dream under the hill.

(On "The lost traveller's dream under the hill" see *Gates of Paradise*, p. 19)

☾ 15

Lo masculino dentro de lo femenino
Lo femenino dentro de lo masculino

The male within a female
The female within a male

(On the text, see: *Jerusalem*, p. 75)
(On the image, see: *The Book of Urizen*, p. 5)

☾ 16

(On the image, see: *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, p. 8, proverb of Hell № 29)

☾ 17

Esperé al alba el momento de esa explosión. La visión, ¿Cuándo rompería la pesada frontera de los sentidos, educada estúpidamente para someterse a la realidad? ¿Cuándo vería la salvaje iridiscencia detrás del velo?

I awaited at dawn the moment of that explosion. The vision. When would I break the heavy border of the senses, stupidly educated to submit to reality? When would I see the savage iridescence behind the veil?

☾ 18

(For pages 18 & 19, see Ezekhiel 1:4–28)

☾ 19

☾ 20

Me pregunto, una y otra vez, cuál es el orden de los factores que legitiman una visión.

I wonder, over and over, which is the order of the factors that legitimize a vision.

(On the image, see: Daniel 7:4 the 1st beast)

☾ 21

¿Ha sido construida con detenimiento en su simbolismo para ser una panoplia del conocimiento incorrupto?

Has it been constructed with care in its symbolism to be a panoply of undefiled knowledge?

(On the image, see: Daniel 7:5 the 2nd beast)

☾ 22

O es que ella llega siempre inexplicable, brillante y cruda, absurda, a atacar los sentidos del loco y el profeta, y somos nosotros quienes construimos la cultura a su alrededor con caprichosas exegesis.

Or is it that she arrives always inexplicable, brilliant and raw, absurd, to attack the senses of the madman and the prophet, and it is us who build culture around it with fanciful exegesis.

(On the image, see: Daniel 7:6 the 3rd beast)

☾ 23

O es tan solo reflejo distorsionado en un cerebro oprimido por el calor del desierto, espejismo, falsa imagen, dios de la ignorancia.

Or is it only a distorted reflection on a brain oppressed by the heat of the desert, mirage, fake image, god of ignorance.

(Greek, vertically: Eidolon, Idol)

(On the image, see: Daniel 7:7 the 4th beast)

☾24

Cubrí mi cuerpo con las palabras para no ver mi desnudez monstruosa

I covered my body with words in order not to see my monstruous nudity.

(On the image, see: *Jerusalem* p. 62)

☾25

Solo en mi imagen se contiene el equilibrio del mundo

Only in my image the balance of the world is contained.

☾26

(On the image, see; Isaiah 6:6)

☾27

(On the image, see: Ezekiel 1:15–18)

(On the two prophets, see *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* p. 12 "The Prophets Isaiah and Ezekiel dined with me, and I asked them how they dared so roundly to assert, that God spoke to them.")

☾28

Ioshua
(on the lamb's halo)

(On the image, see: *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* p. 1 "Rintrah roars & shakes his fires in the burdened air" and *Milton, a Poem's* Frontispiece)

☾29

Voz del profeta en el desierto: En el desierto busco & en el desierto encuentro. La palabra es mi alimento & la palabra es mi instrumento. El fuego toma muchas formas más una es la chispa que lo enciende; pues divino es aquel que siendo uno parece ser muchos ¿Cómo podría aquel, en su infinitud, ofenderse con nuestra libertad, si todos los rostros del hombre están contenidos en el suyo? Miré mis pies desnudos sobre la tierra ardiente mientras el abismo bostezaba a mi alrededor. ¿Es esta la voz que escucharon profetas y apóstoles al abrírseles las puertas celestes que en el desierto con desesperación busco?

Voice of the prophet in the desert: In the desert I seek & in the desert I find. Word is my nourishment & word is my instrument. The fire takes many forms, but one is the spark that turns it on; for divine is him who being one seems to be many. How could him, in his infinity, be offended by our freedom, if all the faces of man are contained in his? I looked at my feet over the burning ground while the abyss yawned around me. Is this the voice heard by prophets and apostles at the opening of the celestial gates which in the desert with despair I seek?

(See *Oedipus* by Sophocles "I cannot be the killer. One can't equal many.")

☾30

Sibila habló: Lo que se sabe siempre muta, lo que se ignora, permanece oculto. Cuando comprendas mi palabra los hombres perderán sus rostros y su entendimiento; y entre las cenizas de las bibliotecas danzarán las bestias. Y los rebaños pacerán y las criaturas reptarán entre las cúpulas derrumbadas de todas las ciudades del hombre.

Los ángeles te darán libros para llenarte de esperanzas vanas y miedos piadosos. Libros vivos y radiantes, escritos por dentro y por fuera, que moverán hasta la última piedra de tu condición de hombre. Amargos en tu vientre y dulces en tu boca. Pero, ¿qué son todos aquellos libros comparados con una voz viva que grita?

Sibyl spoke: What is known always mutates, what is ignored, remains occult. Once you understand my word men shall lose their faces and their understanding; and between the ashes of libraries the beasts shall dance. And the flocks shall feed,

and the creatures shall crawl under the
collapsed vaults of all the cities of men.

The angels shall give you books to fill you with vain hopes and pious fears. Living and radiant books, written on the inside and the outside, that shall shake until the last stone of your condition of man. Bitter in your belly and sweet in your mouth. But what are all those books compared to a living voice that shouts?

(See: Ezekiel 3:1–3, Isaiah 13:20–22, and Revelation 10:9, 10)

☾ 31

☾ 32

AB UNO

Observa: el esclavo de la razón dice: “medí a los hijos de los hombres y los encontré amargos y absurdos, reuní sus veintitrés símbolos naturales y todas sus permutaciones, y dije a Dios: eres razón, eres sistema, eres intelecto, y con mi compás te conoceré. Más su naturaleza me fue esquiva, y el círculo que lo contiene jamás parece cerrar. La teoría no se cumple, mi trabajo debe continuar.

AB UNO

Behold: the slave of reason says: “I measured the sons of men and found them bitter and absurd, I reunited their twenty-three natural symbols and all their permutations, and said to God: you are reason, you are system, you are intellect, and with my compass I shall know you. But his nature was elusive to me, and the circle that contains him does not seem to close. The theory does not function, my work must go on.

(On the image, see Blake’s Monotype: “Newton” 1795, Frontispiece for *Europe a Prophecy*.)
(On the text, see: *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, by Robert Burton, 1621, part. 2, sect. II, mem. IV. “By this art you may contemplate the variation of the 23 letters”)

☾ 33

Observa: el esclavo del impulso. Y me dice una voz imposible: Los ángeles no tienen diez dedos, y no hay reloj que pueda medir la noche. No hay distancia entre el santo, el sabio, y aquel que gatea entre las bestias. Un sueño fue la brújula de mi destino, y por buscar a Dios en el tiempo de la lógica, fui echado de entre los hombres, con las bestias del campo fue mi morada, y con la hierba del campo me apacenté como los bueyes, y con el rocío del cielo fui bañado, y siete tiempos pasaron sobre mí. Yo. Nabucodonosor Rey, dictaré el libro que la humanidad no quiere tener, pero tendrá.

Behold: the slave of impulse. And an impossible voice tells me: Angels do not have ten fingers, and there is no clock that can measure the night. There is no distance between the saint, the wise man, and him that scrambles among the beasts. A dream was the compass of my destiny, and for searching God in the time of logic, I was cast out from among men, with beasts of the field was my dwelling, and with the herb of the field I was fed, and with the dew of the skies I was bathed, and seven times passed upon me. I, Nebuchadnezzar King, shall dictate the book that mankind does not want to have, but will.

(On the image see Blake’s Monotype: “Nebuchadnezzar”, 1795, and his watercolour The flight of Moloch, 1809)
(On the text, see: *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* p. 7, proverb of Hell № 12. Daniel 4:25–33)

☾ 34

La boca de fuego, los ojos de fuego, el torso de fuego, los genitales luz, las manos de fuego, las piernas, gozo eterno, los pies de oro, que nunca han tocado el suelo. Bello como una mujer y más bello que una mujer. El dios envidioso, con pasión bebería su sangre para autogenerarse de nuevo. Los vigilantes observan tensos su paso, su soberbia al perturbar las esferas, su manto de iris sangrante.

The mouth of fire, the eyes of fire, the torso of fire, the genitals light, the hands of fire, the legs, eternal delight, the feet of gold, that have never touched the ground. Beautiful as a woman and more beautiful than a woman. The envious god, with passion would drink his blood to self-generate again. The fraught watchers behold his walk, his pride to disturb the spheres, his cloak of bleeding iris.

(On the text, see: *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* p. 9, proverb of Hell № 48, and *America a Prophecy* p. 10 "...his feet become like brass, his knees and thighs like silver, & his breast and head like gold.")

☾35

(On the image, see: *The Book of Urizen* p. 25)

☾36

El día es unidad y la noche multiplicidad. Más su diferencia es ilusoria. Es en esta necesidad de diferenciación en donde radica el error de toda la percepción humana. La razón grita: Yo. ¡yo! ¡Yo! Cierra las puertas y dedica su vida a observar las llaves. La intuición contempla y ríe. Ves la hoja más eres incapaz de ver el árbol. Ves el árbol siendo incapaz de ver la hoja. Y aquella es la fuente de toda miseria.

The day is unity and the night multiplicity. But their difference is illusory. In this need for differentiation is where the error of all human perception dwells. Reason screams: I. I! I! Shuts the gates and devotes life to behold the keys. Intuition beholds and laughs. You see the leaf, but you are unable to see the tree. You see the tree, incapable of seeing the leaf. And such is the source of all misery.

(On the text, see: *Jerusalem* p. 12 "God is within & without! He is even in the depths of hell.")

☾37

☾38

Oscuras son mis palabras cuando oscuras son tus preguntas. Quien desea comprender lo que no pertenece a la vida debe darse por muerto. Hay una piedra negra detrás del velo, y ante ella todo pensamiento es poco más que procrastinación. Bajo el vientre estrellado, sobre los cuernos de la muerte, terrible y simple es el vino de mi misterio, y la linterna del viajero alumbra la perpetua extrañeza.

Obscure are my words when obscure are your questions. He who wishes to understand that which does not belong to life must consider himself dead. There is one black stone behind the veil, and before her all thought is but procrastination. Under the starry belly, over the horns of death, terrible and simple is the wine of my mystery, and the lantern of the traveller shines in perpetual strangeness.

(On the text, see: Plutarch, *Life of Alexander* 64, and Revelation 18:3)

☾39

☾40

Urizen
Adam Satan

(On the diagram, see: *Milton, a Poem*, p. 32)

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